

Fort Hays State University

FHSU Scholars Repository

Master's Theses

Graduate School

Summer 1941

Tom Plumb, A Novel

Gwendolyn Dimmitt

Fort Hays Kansas State College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.fhsu.edu/theses>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Dimmitt, Gwendolyn, "Tom Plumb, A Novel" (1941). *Master's Theses*. 339.

DOI: 10.58809/ZTLL2437

Available at: <https://scholars.fhsu.edu/theses/339>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at FHSU Scholars Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of FHSU Scholars Repository. For more information, please contact ScholarsRepository@fhsu.edu.

TOM PLUMB

a novel

being

A thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty

of Fort Hays Kansas State College

in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the

Degree of Master

of Science

by

Gwendolyn Dimmitt, A.B., B.S. in Ed.

Fort Hays Kansas State College

Approved Myrtle E. McGinnis
Major Professor

Date July 23, 1941

H. W. Albertson
Chr. Graduate Council

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I acknowledge a debt of gratitude to Dr. Myrta E. McGinnis, Head of the English Department, for her generous assistance to me in the writing of this novel; to Dr. Floyd B. Streeter for his kind encouragements; to Dr. W. D. Moreland, my minor professor, for the aid he has given me; and to Dr. C. E. Rarick, who made it possible for me to do the work.

PREFACE

This is a true story, as far as actual dates and the verification of the incidents is concerned. The writer has filled in the conversation and the human interest bits as it seemed the people of that day might have talked or acted.

Mr. Plumb is a true character, and the story of his life is given according to the facts as the writer was able to find them.

That Mr. Plumb was a typical, and yet individual character, is proved by the fact that one year before his death he was chosen by the Red Willow County, Nebraska, Pioneer Association to drive the oxen and buckboard in the Old Settlers' parade in McCook, Nebraska.

CHAPTER I

The sun sank slowly as though loath to end the day. On a clear patch of ground, on the knob of the hill, the boy stood motionless save for the flicker of his eyelashes which shadowed his gleaming eyes. His hands were clenched and rigid by his sides. He watched the sunset, and his body, outlined against the red of the sky, cast a dark silhouette. He stood alone, but at the foot of the hill a small paint pony, commonly known as a "pinto", pawed the earth impatiently.

All about him reigned intense silence. Not even the leaves of the huge cottonwoods in the valley along the Beaver stirred in the evening air.

Presently the boy made a deep sighing sound and sank to his knees, his eyes still fixed on the distant horizon. He was young; hardly past his twelfth birthday. He was a handsome child and sturdily built. The muscles underneath his rough homespun cloth shirt rippled as he kneeled.

Suddenly he stiffened, and swift as a jackrabbit in his movements, threw himself prone upon his stomach in the tall grass. A lone rider had appeared in the valley below him. He rode slowly as though searching the landscape, and uncertain of his whereabouts. The boy shaded his eyes with his hand, and watched his approach. The rider reached the creek

bank and spurred his horse into the swollen waters. The boy watched in startled amazement as the rider skillfully swam the horse across and climbed with him to safety on the near bank.

"Say, he can ride!" muttered the boy.

The paint pony at the bottom of the hill had caught the scent of the approaching animal. He reared and snorted and the horseman stiffened and drew rein. The boy whistled sharply, and ducked his head into the deep grama grass. The paint whinnied dejectedly and stood still.

The horseman kicked his mount gently in the ribs and rode on slowly, his eyes searching from side to side. When he reached the pony, the boy heard him say,

"Hello, boy, where's your rider? Haven't run away, have ya', old feller?"

The pony's ears twitched, as the rider's horse sought to investigate his nose. The pony shied and trotted off to the side a little way, turning his head to eye the horse and rider. The man shrugged his shoulders and took the path that skirted around the hill. The boy followed him with his eyes until he disappeared around a bend of the creek farther on; then, scrambling to his feet, he raced down the hill and landed in one leap on the pony's saddle-less back. Without a word from the boy the pony dashed in the same direction the rider had gone, but his trail was closer to the creek. The boy rode low over the pony's neck to avoid

the over-hanging trees.

In a bend of the creek, levelling out onto a wide open plain, a crude tent had been pitched. Near the tent a camp-fire burned steadily and beside the fire a man was bent over a frying pan of bacon. He straightened as the boy leapt to the ground beside him, and grinned good-naturedly.

"Well, Tom, you and the paint had a dash, I see. Find anything interestin'?"

"A man," the boy panted, "on a sorrel, headed this way!"

The man's eyes narrowed into sharp slits. "What'd he look like, Tom?"

"Tall, I think, and big--soft voiced. Wore over-alls and a jerkin. Had a gun on each hip."

"Ever see him afore, on the way out, or around here?"

"Nope." The boy frowned in an effort to recall.

"Hm. Better hide yourself in the tent, till he blows this way."

The boy did as he was told and presently he heard the soft clop-clop of the horse's hoofs as the rider rounded the bend. The sudden reining of his horse told the boy the camp had come as a surprise to the rider. There was what seemed to the curious boy a long interval of intense silence. At last, unable to wait longer, he drew back a flap of the tent and looked furtively out. The two men were silently surveying one another.

It was the rider who spoke first, "Howdy." The boy saw him nod his head perceptibly. The man on the ground nodded in return but said nothing.

"My name's Nightengail--Andy Nightengail. Camp's down the creek about fifteen miles. I'm lookin' for water."

The other shook his head. "Ain't none, 'cept the creek. We--I--just camped about an hour ago. Don't know if they's any 'round, or not. My name's Pollock," he added as an after-thought, "Marion Pollock. Many in your camp?"

Nightengail shook his head. "Four families. The women complain of the creek water. Somebody told us there was a well near here."

"Climb down," invited Pollock. Nightengail silently accepted the invitation. "Tom," Pollack called, and immediately the boy was out of the tent.

"This is young Tom Plumb. Tom, meet Andy Nightengail."

"Plumb?" The visitor eyed the boy. "Know any of the Plumbs along the creek here?"

"Yep," The boy was uncommunicative.

"Their nephew," Pollock volunteered. "His family's still in Wisconsin."

"Why?" The question, coming from the boy, startled both men.

"A fellow named Plumb it was who told us there was water up the creek around here," Nightengail answered. "Know of any?"

"Yep," the boy said, again shortly.

"Where?" Both men uttered the question simultaneously.

"Up on the Duckworth place, about ten miles up on the ridge."

"So far?" Nightengail seemed distressed.

"Yep." The boy nodded. "Need a buckboard and a barrel to get enough to do any good."

"Your folks do that?" asked Nightengail.

"Uncle Lont and Uncle Perry do. They carry it down for Aunt Jane, too. I carry my own." The boy pointed proudly toward his pony, who had a brown pouch tied around his neck. As though conscious of the human eyes upon him, the pony whinnied softly and trotted out of the clump of bushes into which the boy had led him at the approach of the visitor.

"That the only well, huh?" Nightengail said presently, as though hoping the boy would change his mind.

"Yep," Tom said, and stroked the pony's smooth neck.

"How come this Duckworth's got the only well?"

"Good location," said the boy. "Grandad Dolph located it with the stick. Everybody 'round pitched in and helped dig it."

Pollock had turned his attention back to the frying pan which he had set off the fire at Nightengail's approach. Now he began the process of heating it again, presently taking some dry bread out of the sack on the ground beside the fire, and placing strips of the thick fat on it. The

coffee he poured into the clay cups was strong and black. Silently he handed Nightengail the food, and silently the latter accepted it. The boy greedily grabbed his portion and began noisily to eat.

There was not much talk until the meager meal was over. Once Nightengail ventured, "Your folks comin' out?" to the boy, and received a barely audible, "Maybe." The boy's mouth was stuffed too full for further conversation.

Once Pollock said, "More coffee?" and extended his hand for the cups. All three ate hungrily, and seemed dissatisfied with the amount.

When they had finished, Tom took the coffee pot and cups down the creek bank and washed them in the stream. The frying pan was thrust back into the sack, still with a goodly amount of deep fat in it.

"Better stay the night," Pollock told Nightengail, "'Tain't safe ridin' them fifteen miles alone in the day time. Worse after dark."

Andy shook his head. "Women folks would worry themselves crazy," he said. "Probably send Ren and Brick out to look for me. No sense in runnin' that risk. I'll make it." He patted the guns on his hips.

"Huh!" Pollock's ejaculation was almost a scornful sneer. But he said nothing until after Nightengail had mounted. Then he asked,

"Ever carry a-rifle?" The tone of his voice indicated

the obviousness of the answer he anticipated, and Nightengail did not say anything.

When Nightengail had rounded the bend out of sight, Mac Pollock turned back to Tom.

"You know a whole hell of a lot you keep to yourself," he said, not unkindly.

"That water?" the boy asked. "Hell, I s'posed you knew that. We dug the well while you were up on the Platte."

"How would I know? Carry it down in barrels, eh? Your Aunt Jane live alone, or with Lont and Perry?"

"They're all three livin' on their claims," the boy answered.

"Any taken off for service?" Mac queried the boy.

"Five years for both," said Tom.

"Lont and Perry both in the army for five years, huh? Where, d'ya know?"

"Sure," said Tom, as though the question were unnecessary. "Along the western border of the Gulf of Mexico. Mostly guerilla warfare. Their discharges date from April in '66. I've heard Uncle Lont tell about it lots of times. I like to hear it."

"You're a queer lad," Mac said. The boy accepted this without comment. Apparently what Pollock thought made little difference.

Early the next morning the two broke camp and started down the creek in the direction Nightengail had taken the

night before. They did not ride close together, yet neither rode far enough from the other to be out of shouting distance. Tom rode closer to the creek. He seemed to notice every little detail of the tree leaves, the creek bank, and the surrounding land. Suddenly he started in his saddle and reined his pony. Clambering off the pony's back, he dropped the reins and moved cautiously forward. A curious looking structure, hidden for the most part by the wild plum thickets which grew in abundance along the creek, had attracted his attention. Here the creek bed had divided, and the rushing of the water swollen by recent rain, had taken the north fork. Only a small trickle of a stream flowed along the south bed. Here several logs had jammed together, forming a V-shape, and the over-hanging trees, together with the mud and creek muck, had covered the jam, giving a cave-like appearance, and leaving a small opening at one end. Tom climbed up onto one of the lower branches of an over-hanging elm, and swung himself out onto the jam. Carefully he worked himself along the logs until he reached the opening. A startled, "By damn", sprung from his lips and he shouted to Pollock, who had been eyeing his movements and had already started toward him. Straightening up, Tom began to search the creek bed and along the bank with his eyes. The abundant growth of the plum bushes prevented a thorough survey.

"What is it?" Mac yelled.

"A wagon wheel, caught here in the log jam," Tom called. He began to work his way along the top of the logs until he could go no further; then he gave a mighty leap, and landed well on the opposite side of the creek. Pollock followed Tom's procedure, stopping only a moment to eye the wagon wheel caught in the jam of the logs. When Pollock jumped to safety on the far side of the creek, Tom was already feverishly tearing aside the bushes, small sounds escaping from him.

"It's been a party!" he yelled, excitedly. "Here's parts of more wagons, and an old spring seat, without the springs. And----", he stopped short for a moment, while he began to dig in the damp ground with his bare fists. "Here, it's a surveyor's chain!" Together the two searched the immediate surrounding land.

"Know who it could be?" Tom asked Pollock.

"No idea," Pollock answered. "No massacres been reported lately. These things are old. Been here a long time."

"Yeah," Tom inspected the chain he held in his hand.

"Rusted pretty bad."

Further investigation revealed several more parts of wagons and tools in a radius of half a mile. No signs of identity of the party were forthcoming, however, and the two rode on. Tom had the chain in his hand when he once again mounted the paint. His keen eye had told him the exact location of the log jam, and he intended to return sometime soon,

though of this he said nothing to Mac.

It was still early in the morning when the two arrived at a crudely constructed dugout which served as the dwelling house of Lont Plumb.

A hail from the boy brought a young woman to the doorway of the dugout.

"Why, Aunt Jane, you here?" Her presence seemed to surprise the boy.

Jane Plumb laughed. "You bet I am," she answered cheerily. "Your Uncle Lont is nothing if not a very poor housekeeper."

"Howdy, Miss Jane." Pollock tipped his wide-brimmed hat.

"Howdy." Jane smiled. "What have you two been doing?"

Tom held up the chain he had unearthed from the debris surrounding the wrecked wagon train. His eyes were bright with excitement.

"We found it, Aunt, up the creek a ways. Ever hear of any raids around here, some time ago?"

Jane shook her head, "No reports ever got back our way," she said. "News travels slow, though. Your Uncle Lont might know."

"Where is Uncle Lont?"

"He and Perry rode down to the new camp. A fellow told Perry yesterday the government is maybe going to put a fort in down there."

Again Tom's eyes sparkled with the excitement of life.

A new fort meant many more families pouring into the land he had begun to love so deeply in a few short weeks. More families meant bigger settlements, and bigger settlements meant the government would have to go ahead and do more to pacify the Indians.

In the few weeks since Tom had come to this new land called Nebraska, which means in the Indian language "Shallow or Broad Water," he had come to love the little Indian boys of the friendly Pawnee tribe who roamed the plains and valleys. He hunted with them, and they shamed him with their skill. He fished with them, and it was they who always made the bigger catch. They rode races over the plains, and no matter how hard Tom tried, and even considering that his paint was an Indian pony, he had not yet learned the skill as the native boys knew it.

Tom's mind was now harboring a plan. He knew what he intended to do as soon as it was possible to slip away from his Aunt and Pollock. The wrecked party he and Pollock had discovered had opened up a well of adventure and excitement ahead of Tom. The Pawnees would love the adventure as much as he. Together they would go over every inch of ground for miles around that wreck. Tom was overcome with curiosity as to the identity of the group, and what their fate had been.

CHAPTER II

It was several days later before Tom was free to pursue the adventure, the idea of which was burning within his brain. It was early in the month of April, in the year 1873. All around Tom life was pulsating. He saw it in the trees and grasses; in the birds and animals. Tom loved all there was in nature. Next to Paint, perhaps, Nature was his most passionate love. He could stand to see no danger come to any of God's creation.

It was this side of his make-up, no doubt, which had instigated his desire to make friends with the little Indian boys of his age. It had been easy enough to do. The Pawnee tribe which roamed the plains above the Beaver Valley were docile and friendly.

Tom's friendship with the Indians had come as a direct result of the digging of the water well on the Duckworth farm on the ridge. Tiring of the monotony of the work, Tom had shirked his share one afternoon, and slipping away with Paint, he had ridden along the ridge northward, hidden from view of the working men by the many box elder trees which had ventured growth out away from the creek bank. Tom kept Paint at a walk, though the pony was impatient to be off, while his eyes searched the valley and hills beyond. This was new territory for Tom. Never had he ridden away from

the Duckworth place so far north, and alone.

It was the pony that first sensed their approach to the Indian camp. His sensitive ears and nostrils twitched, and several times he stopped dead still. Only the persistent urging of Tom caused him to move cautiously forward.

Tom's heart gave a mighty leap when he espied the Camp. His first impulse was to turn Paint and dash back to Duckworth's, but something in the activity of the camp caused him to pause. He had heard his uncles, and the men at Duckworth's talking of the Indians who were camped on a corner of the land which Duckworth had staked claim for at the Land Office. These Indians had left their reservation with the consent of the authorities, for the purpose of hunting in the Republican valley. The prevailing stories were that they were a friendly tribe, but to a lone boy they did not present a friendly picture. A less courageous boy than Tom Plumb would have turned back. But the almost silent activity among the squaws and small browned-skinned children, who were the only visible members of the camp, attracted his attention. Drawn almost magnetically toward them, Tom found himself on the edge of the camp before he realized it. The papooses saw him first and began a series of what seemed to Tom, strange gestures and grunting ejaculations to attract attention toward him. The pointing of their hands brought Tom to the sudden realization that he had ridden into what might be grave danger. They had seen him; it was too late

to turn back now. The deadly aim of one of the younger boys' arrows, even, would make flight impossible.

To Tom's surprise, after the first stares of the squaws they paid no attention to him, but turned back to their work. The children crowded around him, pulling at his legs and on Paint's reins. The pony shied and attempted to bolt, and Tom had all he could do to hold him. He had seen in the brown faces around him, a friendly curiosity. The pony, seeming to sense the returning confidence of Tom, soon settled down to peaceful nuzzling of the little faces around him. Perhaps they brought back to his pony mind remembrances of his colt day, for these were his true people.

Tom's eyes were on the squaws, and soon Tom was to learn one of the most valuable lessons which his life in the new country was to bring him. Around the camp lay what seemed to Tom an enormous number of dead buffalo, part of the animals still with their hides on them. On large plots of the buffalo grass lay huge chunks of the choicest of the meat. But what interested Tom most, was what the squaws were doing with the unskinned meat. Two large poles had been placed at a distance of about sixteen feet apart, and from one pole to another, a limb of a tree, about four feet in diameter, and peeled clean of bark, was suspended. There were several of these poles placed about the camp, and from each limb there hung one of the large buffalo carcasses. It was in this manner that the squaws prepared

the buffalo meat which was brought in by their liege lords. It was then cut into thin, long strips and spread out on the grass and brush to dry. The meat was then called jerked meat.

The Indian children seemed to be trying to interest Tom in their game. It was a game requiring proficiency in the art of shooting a bow and arrow. At a distance of about one hundred feet one of the buffalo skins had been stretched out and fastened to a rough log in an upright position, presumably as a target. The object of the game seemed to be to land one of the arrows in the middle of the skin, and to follow it swiftly with another, the second splitting in two the first. Tom watched in amazement as arrow after arrow fell in shattered pieces on the ground below the target. Even the boys who could not possibly, it seemed to Tom, be past the age of five or six, seldom missed. And if they did miss, it was cause for a series of derisive grunts and shouts to issue forth from the rest.

Presently one of the older boys handed his bow and quiver to Tom and pointed toward the skin, speaking to him in the Pawnee tongue. Tom could not understand the boy, but he knew that he was supposed to try his skill at their game.

Tom was ashamed to let these Indian children see his poor skill. He had used a bow and arrow a goodly number of times. In the caravan on his way to Nebraska from

Wisconsin, he had spent many of the hours in the saddle whittling for himself a crude bow and arrow. With this he had practiced after the caravan stopped in the dusk of the day. Later, his uncles had given him better bows and many arrows which they had secured from the Pawnees in return for pocket knives, or some worthless trinket, but even then Tom knew he was not equal to the Indians.

But Tom was nothing if not a good sport. Taking careful aim, he pulled back with mighty effort on the bow string. His young muscles rippled and bulged as his arm answered the strain. With a sharp twang the arrow left the bow, and for the swift second it took for the arrow to reach its mark, Tom was both motionless and breathless. A sudden shout arose from the group around him, and admiration poured into the faces. Tom stared at the crude target. His arrow had landed as near in the middle as the middle could be judged. But Tom had not yet achieved true fame. He must still prove himself by the second part of the test. The Indians watched him intently. Tom's hand trembled slightly, and had he been in the habit of calling upon his God for aid, it is likely he would have done so now. He aimed and released the arrow, and again the shout went up, but this time it was of a different tone. Tom knew, without looking, that he had missed. What was more, he had missed by a good two inches. He threw the bow down in disgust with himself, but he was not so easily

out of it. They thrust it back into his hands and would not let him refuse. Tom spent the rest of the afternoon playing with the Indians. Soon he was able to split his second arrow as skillfully as any of them, and as soon as that happened, interest in the game began to lag. But there were many other forms of diversion. Once Tom took his shining new knife from his pocket and immediately the oldest of the Indian boys grabbed it from him. Tom had a swift temper and for a moment it seemed he might fight the boy.

Then he recalled the Pawnees' greed for such things. They were persistent beggars, appearing at dugout doors and trading posts frequently and refusing to leave until they had obtained the object of their desires.

It was later than he realized when Tom looked around for Paint. The pony had been left to wander around the Camp and plain at will. Now he stood quietly near, apparently waiting for Tom to make up his mind to go back. The Indians seemed to be begging him to stay, but Tom could imagine the consternation at Duckworth's over his prolonged absence. He was right. Half-way back along the ridge, he met Lont and Perry Plumb and several others of the men. His uncles were in an ill humor at the unnecessary concern he had caused them and as a result he was forbidden to revisit the Camp. But Tom had ignored these warnings, and since that afternoon he had been a frequent visitor. Not

only had he made good friends with them, but he had learned their language to a sufficient extent as to be able to converse in their tongue, a fact which made their friendship even more delightful. As soon as his uncles realized his attachment to the Pawnees, and their return admiration, they permitted him liberty to play with them as he chose. Many times he rode from sun-up to sun-down, hard over the plains, getting beaten every time in races, but with exhilarated feelings.

Now it was Tom's plan to let the Pawnee boys join him in what he hoped and believed would be a high adventure.

The discovery of the identity of the wagon party he found, and which no one seemed able to explain, would give Tom an added prestige and a place among the settlers which his heart longed for. Already, he knew, many of the men and women considered him an unusual boy. They admired his various abilities, and looked upon his physique with friendly pride. Tom could never remember a day in his life when he had been sick. His uncles bragged of his accomplishments, but if Tom could do this thing he wanted so much to do, he would have proved his prowess even to his own satisfaction.

Tom's appearance at the Indian camp early in the morning two or three days following his discovery of the wagon wheel caused a ripple of excitement among the boys of his age, who looked upon his coming as a sign of some new

game he had for them. They were soon as enthusiastic as he about his plan. To his disappointment, neither they, nor the braves, could give a clue to the identity of the lost wagons. It was a five-mile ride back to the log jam, and Tom and some eight or nine of the Indian boys made it in record time. The boys clambered over the logs in characteristic curiosity. Tom instructed them to search for wagon parts and tools. But the search was futile except for two items. Tom was discouraged at the futility of the hunt, for his hopes of recognition among his fellow men were rapidly disappearing. Presently he saw a group of the boys gathered excitedly around one of their number. Tom's nimble feet brought him to the spot, and he seized upon the article. His breath caught. It was a compass! What could have been the nature of the party to have used a compass?

"Where was this?" Tom demanded of the boy who had found it.

The boy pointed to a hole in a rotten log which lay upon the ground. Tom dived toward the log and rammed his hand far into the hole. His fist closed upon a hard, cold object. Pulling out his arm, Tom held up his find. It was covered with leaves and muck, but it seemed to shine in the summer sunshine. His fingers soon had the debris wiped away, and what he saw was a spoon! A silver spoon! This fact told Tom one thing--the party had either been well-to-do, or else someone had seen to it that they

were well-staked.

The two articles were all that the hunters found, though they searched well into the afternoon. Neither Tom nor the boys seemed to think of food. Instead, when they wearied of hunting, they turned their attention to racing their ponies. Tom still nursed the secret hope that he might some day beat them at this game. This time the race was not on the level plain as the previous races had been. Instead, the almost dry bed of the south fork of the creek presented a different form of thrill. Down the creek about fifty yards from the location of the log jam, the bed of the creek narrowed considerably, until it was only about twenty feet wide. Soon all the riders were spurring their ponies toward this spot, taking the jump as gracefully as the small ponies made it. Tom knew he could jump as well as any one of the Indians, and he did not spare Paint. All might have gone well, had not that terror and deadly enemy of all mankind, a rattlesnake, chosen that particular spot to coil himself in the afternoon sun. Tom had urged Paint into a furious gallop, and was anticipating the thrill of the leap, when the pony gave a sudden terrific lurch to one side, and Tom flew over his head, landing in a stunned heap. The almost human moan of wounded horse-flesh roused him. Paint lay flat on his side, his flanks dark with sweat, and his body heaving. One leg was crumpled under him. The Indian boys stood in a semi-circle

some yards away. Tom moved, and instantly froze. A warning rattle had reached his ears. The pony had heard it, too, and rolled his eyes piteously toward Tom. The boy groaned inwardly. He had not yet located the snake; how close he was he could only guess. The Indians were no help. Brave as they were in some respects, a rattlesnake was one thing which terrorized them.

Another warning came from the snake, and Tom knew its whereabouts to be behind him. A stick of dead wood lay almost within reaching distance of Tom's arm, but not close enough. Tom lay rigidly still for what seemed agonizing hours; then slowly, slowly, a half inch at a time, he edged his body toward the stick. Twice terror froze his movements, as the snake rattled ominously. The Indians watched in fascinated silence, but made no move to come to his rescue.

At last Tom's finger tips touched the end of the stick. One more move and he could grasp it. Tom had heard no sound from the snake for the space of nearly a minute. He expected at any moment to hear the final warning rattle. But when it came it was not as Tom had expected it.

It was Paint who was to be the victim of the snake's anger. Just as Tom made the final movement toward the stick, Paint's agonizing shriek caused him to lunge to his feet. Paint was flailing his head in horrible effort to escape the poisonous fangs of the reptile.

Tom did not know what to do. To strike the snake would mean to strike Paint, too. He began to tease the snake with an end of the branch, but this served only to increase his venom. Tom knew it was hopeless. Turning toward the Indians, he leaped upon one of their ponies without a word, and was soon streaking down the creek toward his uncle's dugout.

It was a panting, half-hysterical boy who threw himself to the ground and ran yelling for his uncle's pistol. A few incoherent words told Perry that Paint was in some sort of trouble. He sought to prevent Tom's demand for his gun, but the boy grabbed it and was gone again.

When Tom returned to the scene of the tragedy, the Indians were gone, as was the snake. Paint lay in helpless appeal, his nose swollen and disfigured from the bites. A dry sob broke from Tom and he gathered the pony's head in his arms. But he did not give way to his grief for long, for he realized the pony's intense pain.

"Forgive me, Paint," he muttered. "I didn't mean to hurt you!"

He stood above the pony a second longer, then stooping, he placed the gun against the white spot on the pony's head. Tom could not open his eyes; his teeth clenched, but his hand was steady as he pulled back on the trigger. There was a muffled report, Paint's body moved convulsively

and was still, and Tom lay heartsick and frightened, flat on the ground beside him.

CHAPTER III

For four days following Tom could not be consoled.

On the morning of the fourth day, Perry Plumb looked out the door of the dugout and stared in amazement. A strange procession was approaching along the creek bank. There were several of the Indian boys riding in single file, the first leading a beautiful black pony, with four white-stockinged legs, and a white star on his forehead. Tom had heard his uncle's startled outburst and had come to investigate. He had refused to eat breakfast that morning, as he had done the three previous mornings, an unheard of event, for usually Tom's appetite was huge. Now he recognized Roaming-Scout's sturdy son, Eagle-Feathers. The Indian boy was leading the black pony and, riding close to Tom, he slid to the ground and placed the lead rope tied around the pony's neck, in Tom's hand. Then silently they all waited for Tom to speak. But Tom could not. He knew the Pawnees meant the pony to be his, in the place of Paint.

He passed his hand gently over the pony's neck and mane. The little pony shivered, and shied away. Tom began to call softly, "Come boy, come fellow, whoa!"

The pony responded to his gentle voice, and stood quietly while Tom stroked him.

"He's beautiful! He's.....!" Tom could say no

more. Turning back to Eagle Feathers, he grinned. It broke the tension of the Indians, who had gathered around him in a circle. A terrific yell went up. It was a signal for action.

In a flash they all started in a hard gallop, south across the lowland. Tom's first impulse was to be after them, but the pony had shied again and he thought better of it. Instead, he continued to stroke the pony's flanks softly.

"It's all right, fellow," he assured the little horse.

The pony's ears twitched, and his flanks quivered as Tom approached his side and placed one hand on his neck.

"I'll call you Dan!" he whispered. "Come, Dan. Steady, boy!" In a swift motion, Tom was astride the pony's back, and streaking after the Pawnees.

It was Tom's last ride with the Pawnees. The next day the Indians started north on their annual hunt. Tom watched them break camp. Everything was loaded on their horses, all their household goods, their cured meat, and the tanned buffalo hides. Tom saw many articles which he realized his brown-skinned friends had stolen. Suddenly he remembered that his Uncle Perry had gone down to the Nightengail camp, and that his dugout was unprotected and on the route the Indians would follow to the Republican river. Riding back to the dugout, he took his uncle's needle gun and sat down in front of the door with the gun in

his lap. If the Indians saw him as they passed, they gave no sign of greeting. Tom saw Eagle-Feathers and several of the boys he had ridden with so many times, but all were intent on the trail ahead of them. They went on by, and Tom felt suddenly lonely. He would miss their friendship, and the days they had spent together.

But if the Pawnees passed by Perry Plumb's dugout without apparent thought of plunder, the same could not be said of their activity farther down the creek.

When Perry and Lont Plumb returned to the dugout later in the day, it was with great relief that they learned of Tom's guard. At the Nightengail camp the Indians had proved their reputation for beggary, and had refused to leave until the articles they coveted had been turned over to them.

Soon after the Indians left, Tom's mind returned to thoughts of the lost wagon party. One day he persuaded a boy named Bill Shockley to go with him to the spot for another search. They took their guns with them in case they wanted to do some hunting. This search, however, was more successful, though the identity of the party remained a mystery for several years. Bill and Tom, as they searched, ran onto a wood-rat's house in which they found several more feet of surveyor's chain and twenty or more rim-fire Spencer cartridges. Farther away they found the remains of the campfire, where the buffalo grass had not yet grown over the black coals, and some distance farther up the creek, .

they discovered two more wagons, one a heavy vehicle, and the other a lighter one.

Tom's uncles had begun the work of the spring farming, and Tom was needed to help, so for awhile, at least, his carefree days were over. By the middle of May, Perry had turned a good many furrows on his own land, and Lont was not far behind. But the work on Jane's land was not so far progressed, and most of her planting had to be done on the sod. The plentiful rainfall was over, and the middle of May saw the crops failing to germinate for lack of moisture. Had the settlers but known it, June was to be no better, and discouragement would have descended upon the people. Those who were fortunate enough to plant early in May were destined to raise fair crops, and Perry and Lont were among the more successful ones, for by early planting, their crops of corn and potatoes were growing steadily by the time the worst of the later drought hit.

After the heavier work of the crops was finished, Perry, Lont, and Tom began work on a new semi-dugout for Jane. Jane lived alone on the land her brothers had filed for her in the Land Office at Lowell. Jane was a courageous young woman, and the spirit of adventure in her new life appealed to her. If there were times when she wished masculine company, deep in the dark of the prairie night, she never spoke her thoughts aloud. Now the prospect of a new dwelling place filled her days with happy anticipation.

One day she sent Tom to Indianola, which was about twenty miles north, for some material for curtains for the new place. Tom went alone on Dan. Jane had given him a slip of paper with the direction for the buying of the material written upon it. This Tom carelessly thrust into his overall pocket, and started out. His ride was uneventful, and he arrived in Indianola about the middle of the day. As Tom rode down the crudely constructed street of the settlement, a small black and tan shepherd dog ran out howling from the doorway of one of the frame buildings, closely followed by an irate man with a raised shot-gun. The dog saw Tom and Dan and made directly for them. Before he realized his actions, Tom was off Dan and had caught the dog in his arms. The man in the doorway saw what had happened too late to stop the pressure he had placed on the trigger. With a shout of horror, he saw the boy crumple on his face in the dirt. The little dog whined and licked Tom's face. The man with the gun dived back into the doorway from which he had come, and later appeared as a concerned bystander in the crowd which had gathered around Tom. It was Andy Nightengail who reached the boy first. His first surprise of recognition was lost in his anxiety to stop the blood from the wound in Tom's left arm. He stripped off his shirt, which was made of rough LL denim material, and bound Tom's arm tightly, then picked him up in his arms and carried him into the nearest store, where a thorough

investigation revealed that the bullet had gone straight through the arm, leaving a clean hole. He ordered boiling water and one of the women brought a pan full which she had already prepared, as soon as she had seen that Tom was hurt. With the water kept almost boiling hot, from frequent re-fills, Andy bathed Tom's arm.

When Tom opened his eyes, the first person he saw was the woman who had realized the necessity for hot water. She smiled down at him. Tom tried to move, but sank back onto the floor at the sudden pain in his arm.

"You be still, now, lad," the woman cautioned.

Tom began to fumble in his breast pocket for the slip of paper his aunt had given him, and handed it to the woman. Wonderingly, she took it, and as she read it tears began to crease her cheeks.

"Bless your heart, lad," she murmured. She handed the paper to Andy, who read it, and nodded.

"It's for his aunt," he explained.

Wondering questions were being asked concerning Tom's accident. No one had seen it, apparently, for no one had an explanation to offer. The little dog that had caused the trouble had somehow managed to get back into the store, and now he pushed through the people and came up to where Tom lay, his tail dejectedly hanging between his legs. Tom saw him and reached out his good arm. Immediately the dog began to lick his hand.

"That your dog, lad?" the woman asked.

Someone else answered, "That's Joe Phillips' dog."

All eyes sought out Phillips, and at the mention of the man's name, the dog moved closer to Tom.

"That your dog, Joe?" someone asked.

"That's my dog, all right."

Tom moved in an effort to see the speaker, but Phillips kept behind him.

Andy Nightengail said, "Did you shoot at that dog, Phillips?"

Phillips made no answer, and Nightengail said to Tom, "Would you know the fellow who shot you if you saw him?"

Tom nodded, and Nightengail pushed Phillips forward into Tom's view. For a long interval Tom and the man eyed each other. Then Tom turned his head in disgust and said,

"Hell, the fellow who shot at that dog knows who he is. If he wants to be that way about it, let it go. I ain't killed, am I?"

At that the question of the shooting was left, until later. Presently Tom was moved into the dugout of the woman, and Nightengail promised to secure the material for Jane. Tom's arm hurt him a good deal through the day, but he made no complaint. Sensing his pain, the woman talked,

"I'm Lucy Dolph," she told him. "You're young Tom Plumb, aren't you? I've heard about you. Mac Pollock has told everyone about the lost wagons you found. Ever

find out anymore about it?"

Tom shook his head. "No one knows who it was."

"Ain't that a strange thing, now?" Lucy said. "Not even a trace to tell who they was. Looks like the government 'ud know. Your folks gonna come out here, Tom?"

"I'm hopin' so," Tom answered. "Uncle Perry's been tryin' to get Pa to. Ma ain't wantin' to very much."

"Lots of women don't at first. We soon begin to like it, though. My sakes, that dog's took a fancy to you!"

The little dog had refused to be parted from Tom, and seeing this, Tom had insisted he be allowed to accompany him to Lucy's home.

"You been down to the new Fort the government's puttin' in?" Lucy asked.

"Not lately," Tom said. "Been too busy with the farm work. You seen it?"

"No," Lucy answered. "We've been meanin' to go over and see it all, but they's too much work to do around here."

Later in the afternoon, Nightengail came for Tom in his buckboard. Lucy insisted on putting one of her covers in the bed of the wagon, saying Tom's aunt could send it back some time later in the summer, since Lucy would not be needing it.

The ride home was a painful one for Tom, but the little dog helped to alleviate the pain. He had leaped into the buckboard when Tom had been helped in, and once more had

refused to get out. Once Andy lifted him out, but no sooner had the dog hit the ground, than he was back in the wagon, crouching beside Tom.

"Let me keep him," begged Tom. "Whoever owns him, don't want him anyway."

So the dog was allowed to remain, and he rode quietly beside Tom, sometimes licking the boy's face with his little red tongue, and whining his gratitude.

"Tom," Andy began, when they were well out of Indianola, "you gonna tell me who shot you?"

"Sure," Tom snorted. "S'posed you knew. That damned Phillips, o' course. Why?"

Andy began to hum between his teeth, and Tom sensed the anger which was rising in the older man.

"It's worth bein' shot to have this dog," Tom went on. "He likes me."

Andy shrugged, but said nothing, and Tom knew that Joe Phillips would yet be called to reckon for his temper.

Presently Andy said, "Got a letter for your Uncle Perry, Tom."

"A letter!" Tom strained to raise himself on his good arm.

Nightengail nodded. "A letter," he repeated.

Tom moved impatiently. "Well, who's it from? Where was it written?"

"Well, now, Tom," teased Andy. "I don't rightly know."

I don't open the mail I carry---."

"Oh, damn it, give it to me! Is it from Pa?"

Andy threw back his head in a loud guffaw. "Here it is. You'd better not open it or I won't reckon with Perry. But you can look at it."

"It is!" Tom breathed. "Oh, Andy, it is! It's from Pa! Uncle Perry wrote him about the Beaver fort. They must be comin' out."

When Tom and Andy reached Nightengail's camp, Tom was surprised to find both his uncles there. In his excitement about the letter he forgot his injury, and began to shout,

"A letter from Pa, Uncle Perry! Open it quick!"

"By God, what's happened to you?" Perry demanded.

"Open it, quick!" Tom implored.

"What happened, Andy?" Lont wanted to know, giving the small dog a soft kick to extricate him from beneath his feet.

"It all happened over that dog you just kicked, Lont. Fellow named Joe Phillips at Indianola shot at the dog, and got Tom in the arm. No bone shattered, and it's a clean hole."

Lont and Perry stared at the unexpressive Tom. Then realizing Tom's attitude on the affair, they, too, let the matter drop for the time being, as Andy had done.

"What yo' gonna do with the dog, Tom?"

"Why, I--I thought maybe----. Hell, I'm gonna keep him."

He can catch rabbits!"

Perry opened the letter from Tom's father and scanning it briefly, handed it to Tom.

"Yippee!" yelled Tom when he had read it. "They're comin'! They're on their way!" The dance he proceeded to demonstrate can best be described as an imitation of the pow-wow dances he had seen the Pawnees give.

His shouts brought Ren and Brick Wilson from their work in the little blacksmith shop which they had set up, to see what the excitement was about. Their joy at the news almost equalled Tom's. New families meant more, and perhaps nearer, neighbors.

"Where's he goin' to settle?" Ren asked.

Perry answered him. "I filed claim at Lowell for 160 acres for him up the creek a ways. Part of it's on the land where Tom found the remains of those wagons."

Tom's eyes gleamed. "They're comin'!" he kept shouting. "Pa and Ma in a caravan of twenty wagons!"

"Twenty!"

"They won't all get clear out here," Lont said. "Some of 'em got friends and relations along the way."

"They comin' on alone?"

"I guess so." Perry said. "Been thinkin' we'd ought to ride back and meet 'em. Don't see how we can, now, though. Too much that's needin' to be done. Jane's wantin' that new dugout mighty bad."

Again a plan immediately began to germinate in the fertile brain of Tom. Perhaps his uncles would let him go to meet his folks, if he could find some one to go with him. Mac Pollock! Mac would go'.

The wound in Tom's arm seemed not to be remembered. Even his aunt's horrified countenance when she saw him did not swerve his mind from his purpose to go to meet his parents. Later that night, however, the pain became more intense. His aunt had insisted that he stay with her so that she could care for him if he needed her. But Tom's stubborn pride made him refuse to call her. He lay silently with huge drops of perspiration gathering on his upper lip, until he could stand it no longer. He began to roll his head from side to side, biting his lips to keep from crying out. His aunt heard; possibly she had not been able to sleep soundly because of her unconscious worry for him. His arm was stiff and he could not bear to move it. The hot cloths that Jane wrapped around it seemed to serve only to increase the fever.

Finally she said, "Tom, have you ever drunk whiskey?"

Tom groaned. "Yes," he muttered.

"Then I will." Jane's chin set determinedly.

She brought him a drink of hot water and sugar, mixed strong with whiskey, and placing a capable arm under his shoulders, she raised him to a half-sitting position. The movement sent hot pains through Tom's entire left side.

"Here, Tommy, drink it down fast," Jane coaxed.

He gulped the fiery liquid, and lay back in exhaustion. Soon a sort of pinkish haze began to permeate his brain. His eyes closed heavily, and he forced them open, begging for more of the drink. But before Jane returned with it, Tom was in a world of confused thoughts and blank voids. The room seemed to sway gently, his bed going round in furious circles. He seemed to be floating on a thin slice of air, holding rigid and breathless lest he fall off. Suddenly he shot down into an abyss, black and burning hot. His hands twitched at the bed covers and Jane had to hold them over him, until he suddenly leaped from the abyss onto an ephemeral mass of rolling mist. His arms seemed to be under him and he struggled to rise but a hidden force pushed him back. On and on he travelled past plains and trees, and over unknown mountains. Suddenly he was horribly thirsty, but his blanched lips refused to move. Inwardly he begged for water and miraculously a waterfall appeared, into which he walked bodily, unmindful of the raging torrent. At last he ceased his wandering and he was on a plot of deep buffalo grass with Eagle-Feathers begging to play with his shining knife. Tom was too sleepy to care. He rolled over in the warm sun and went to sleep.

It was two weeks before Tom was able to move his arm without sharp blades of pain creasing through it. In the meantime he had voiced his desire to make the trip back to

meet the caravan in which his parents were travelling. At first Perry and Lont were reluctant, but seeing Tom's acute disappointment, and encouraged by Mac Pollack's enthusiasm about the idea, they finally agreed.

It was by a chance over-hearing of a conversation between Mac and Andy that Tom learned that Mac had beaten Joe Phillips badly because of the injury the latter had dealt Tom. Phillips, true to his cowardly instincts, had turned tail and begged for mercy from Mac's revengeful fists. Tom was sorry Mac had taken up the fight. To Tom, the adoration in the dog's eyes quite made up for his pain and inconvenience. The dog had stayed constantly by Tom's side during his illness, often leaping upon the bed to lap Tom's face with his soft, warm tongue. Tom had named the dog Scott, and soon it was apparent that the black pony would at last have to share Tom's affections with another animal. The pony and dog seemed immediately to make friends. At Tom's first attempt to ride after the gun wound, the dog cavorted wildly, leaping into the air in peculiar gyrations.

Having definitely decided on the trip by horse back into Iowa, Mac and Tom lived in a fever of preparation. Tom's arm was still too tender to allow him the activity he was used to, but at last the day arrived and the two set out.

CHAPTER IV

Tom and Mac Pollock left for Iowa on the 29th of May. Tom was excited, and wanted to gallop Dan. The black pony responded to his mood, and Pollock had all he could do to convince the two of the need for preservation of strength and endurance.

Each rider carried a light rifle across the bow of his saddle, and Pollock had a pair of six-guns strapped around his waist. Tom wanted to stop at the Beaver Fort again, but Pollock saw the need of steady travelling and refused.

Ren Wilson called to them from the Fort office.

"Got them government papers, Mac."

Mac waved his hand in recognition, but a look of concern crossed his face.

"What paper's that?" queried Tom.

"For the postoffice," Mac answered, "wants to name his camp Wilsonville and handle the mails. It'll be put on the maps. Andy's goin' to be plenty mad."

Tom's eyes glittered belligerently. "'Tain't fair to Andy," he declared. "He's worked hard, carryin' the mail twice a week clear from the fort to Ludell and back. Aunt Jane's gonna be mad, too."

"Jane won't care," Mac asserted. "She's tired takin' care of it, anyway. Ain't no job for a woman."

Tom grinned. He had been quick to notice Mac's protective concern for his Aunt Jane. He thought he'd like having Pollock as an uncle, but of this he made no mention to Mac.

They rode late into the afternoon. It was a wearying ride because they must be ever on the alert for strange sounds which might carry an ominous warning. Tom's eyes and ears had become expertly sharpened in the time he had lived on the Beaver.

However, the day's ride was uneventful and toward dusk they camped. Their route had been to the northward and the spot they chose for their camp was on the brink of the Republican river. The river was a rushing torrent, swollen by the abundant rains of the preceding month and the water which had emptied into it farther west, and Pollock did not want to attempt to ford it until daylight.

The two were tired and talked very little, and as soon as their meal was over, both stretched out upon the ground. Tom lay on his back, his eyes searching the heavens above. Sometimes his breath seemed to catch at the very beauty over him.

"Mac," he called softly.

A sleepy grunt answered him.

"Mac, Pa and Ma are gonna love it out here. They got

to," he added fiercely, half under his breath.

"Sure," Pollock mumbled, "go to sleep, now."

Tom rolled over onto his side, but sleep came slowly. His active mind refused to be done with thoughts. It wandered on into the future, and as suddenly flashed back into the past.

Tom had been born in Jefferson County, New York state. When Tom and his small sister, Margaret, were three and one year of age, respectively, the news which was rapidly spreading about the new fortunes to be found in western lands, reached Tom's father, Hiram Plumb, and his wife, Ellen Mackey Plumb. So from New York State they began the trek to Wisconsin, settling near the site which later became Danville. Even then Tom's baby mind must have been fertile, for dim traces of the wagon trip clung mistily in his memory. His mother's anxious face, as she watched over the baby was vivid before him. The baby had come down with diphtheria after the trip was started, and when the news spread that the child was ill, the Plumb wagon had been ostracized from the train. At first they stopped to secure what aid could be found, but when it was discovered that the child was beyond help, Tom's father had trudged doggedly onward with his lone wagon, carrying Tom, or holding the boy on the seat beside him, while the careworn mother shed bitter tears over the little girl. At night they made two separate fires and camps. His mother saw to it that the dishes were

carefully segregated, boiling the ones she used and placing the skillet in the hot embers of wood. Tom's father prepared the food for the little boy and himself, tucked Tom in the rolls of blankets, and then he chose a spot beside the brightly burning fire, to smoke and stare anxiously toward his wife and baby. He could see the outline of his wife, bulky with the approach of another child, as she stood silhouetted by the flame of the burning wood.

"Ellen," he called softly, not to disturb the fretting boy.

"Yes, Hiram?"

"How is she?"

"No change, I guess. She keeps gaspin' for breath, and I can't help her." Her voice caught on a sob.

"Steady, old girl." Hiram's voice was strangely gruff.

"Better lay down now. You feel all right?"

"Oh, yes, I'm all right," she answered, drawing a deep breath of the cold night air into her lungs.

"Good night, Ellen," he called, pronouncing the name 'Ellin' with the accent on the last syllable.

"Good night-----Hiram, how's Tom? No signs of any kind yet?"

"No sign, Ellen. He'll be all right. He's a husky lad."

Though neither spoke the remainder of the night, little sleep came to them. In the first streaks of the dawn, they

were up and travelling on.

One day, about sundown, the heavy burlap sacks which divided the two ends of the wagon were suddenly wrenched aside with a violent pull, and Hiram turned to see the stricken face and blood shot eyes of his wife staring at him. Quickly he halted the horses and went to her.

"She's gone?"

"Don't touch me!" she warned. "Yes," she nodded. "She's gone."

Then she lay on the floor of the wagon, her shoulders convulsed in racking sobs. He tried to lift her but she shook her head and pushed him away.

"Drive on, while there's still light," she said. "I'll be all right."

He left her there, and went back to comfort Tom, who had started to cry at his mother's first outburst.

"There, son. There, little man. Mother's all right. Come on, now, drive old Doll and Nip for Pa."

By the time the sun was too far gone to permit further travelling, Ellen Plumb had regained her self-control. The body of the baby girl lay in a basket in one corner of the wagon, completely covered with a light quilt.

"Let's don't leave her here, or along the way, Hiram," Ellen pleaded. "Let's take her on to Wisconsin."

"We can't do that, Ellen," Hiram said. "We can't tell how much longer we'll be. We got to bury her here."

"No!" she whispered, burying her face in her hands as she sat on a tree log.

Hiram didn't stop to argue the matter. Taking the shovel, he started down the creek, leaving her alone with Tom. When he came back she had the dead child clutched tight in her arms.

"You can't!" she said wildly.

"Ellen, give her to me."

"NO!"

"Ellen!"

Suddenly she thrust the child into his arms, and pushing the clinging Tom aside, ran to the wagon.

"Pa'll be back soon, son," Hiram told Tom. "You stay here by the fire, and you'll be all right."

Tom had wanted to go with his father, but he stayed as he was told. He watched his father carrying the child away, and knew that he returned alone, but he was not conscious of any acute sense of loss.

Fifteen days later the Plumbs had stopped at Danville, and there they had stayed. There had been born the new baby girl, named Alice, and two years later another, named Mary.

Now Hiram and Ellen Plumb were again coming on a journey to a new land, and Tom was eager to see how his mother felt about the change. He hoped she was well, and that there wasn't another baby on the way.

The second day Tom and Mac reached the eastern edge of Furnas County. When they reached the Big Blue river several days later they turned almost directly north, following the stream. This country had been more thickly populated, and there were several townsites and camps along the way.

Toward the close of the tenth day, as they climbed a steep bluff high above the Missouri river, a horseman rode into view. Tom and Mac were immediately on the alert, but it soon became evident that the rider was friendly.

He seemed familiar to Tom, and as they neared one another, Tom suddenly shouted,

"Dolph!"

The rider started, and then rode quickly forward.

"Gene Dolph!" Tom called again. "Don't you know me? Tom Plumb?"

"Why, sure, Tom." Dolph's face broke into a smile. "Your folks are comin' in my train. They're back about eight or ten miles. I rode on ahead to see what I could find. Where you goin'?"

"We was comin' to meet 'em. How's Ma, Dolph, and Pa?"

"Your Pa's all right, and your sisters. Guess your Ma's pretty much upset about comin' out here. She don't talk much."

Tom's face showed concern. He had wanted his parents to love Nebraska as much as he had learned to love it. Perhaps after they were settled, his mother would feel differently.

Dolph decided to ride back to the train with them, and they went on until heavy darkness prevented further travelling. Then Mac suggested they had better stop, since the caravan would not be travelling more that night, and there was no danger of it passing them. Tom made camp with reluctance, for the knowledge that his parents were so close made his eagerness even more intense. But he followed the advice of his older companions, and helped with his share of the camp work. He slept little, and was the first on his horse to start the next morning. The men let him ride on, alone, and faster, with Dolph's instructions to keep on the bluffs so that he could see far into the valley and so not miss the wagons.

Tom had not ridden far when he saw below him a dark line, winding slowly along the river. His heart leaped and after the first momentary pull on Dan's reins, he started the pony on a mad gallop down the bluffs into the lower valley.

A rider from the lead wagon saw him coming and rode out to meet him.

Tom reined, and waved a greeting.

"Thought you was Dolph," the man said. "Seen anything of a man riding a big bay horse?"

"Yes. He's back a ways. I'm Tom Plumb. My folks are here."

"You'll find 'em about ten or twelve wagons back.

Where you from?"

"Nebraska!" Tom shouted over his shoulder as he urged Dan on down the line of wagons.

"Pa!" Tom recognized the familiar figure of his father with his curling mustache and long, black beard.

"Tom! Son! Where'd you come from? Anything wrong? Ma, here's Tom!"

Tom had time to answer, "Nothing wrong, Pa. Just rode back to meet you," before he was in the wagon and his mother's shining eyes were regarding him. She made no move to embrace him, nor he to touch her. But her eyes drank in every detail of his face and body. She was thinner, he noticed, and big with another child. She looked tired and unhappy, but she said softly,

"Tommy! You came back to meet us? Alice! Mary! Here's your brother Thomas."

Two little girls near the same age, dressed in dark blue denim frocks, and looking shy, poked their faces around the wagon curtain and eyed him. Tom grinned back at them and reached to pull the nearest one's pig-tail.

"Ouch!" She drew back, and looked at her mother. "Ma!"

Ellen laughed. "Same old tease, aren't you?" Her voice was refined and modulated.

Tom and his father had much to talk about. "It's wonderful land, Pa," Tom told Hiram, "Rich and fertile. Rained a lot in April. Need more rain, now, but crops still are

pretty good."

"Lont and Perry got much out?"

"Corn. Potatoes and melons, too. Some cabbage. Aunt Jane's don't do so good. There wasn't time to deep furrow here."

"Something wrong with your arm, Son?"

"Oh, that!" Tom dismissed it with a laugh. "Got a dog for my trouble. Name's Scott."

"How'd it happen?"

Tom told him.

"Named Phillips, huh?"

" 'Tain't worth botherin' about. See my pony? Eagle-Feathers brought him, after I lost Paint from a rattle-snake bite."

"Eagle-Feathers?"

"A Pawnee boy."

They talked the rest of the long day as the caravan dragged itself slowly westward. They left the river and started on across the plain. It was hot and windy, and Ellen's face was anxious.

"If it's like this the middle of June, what will the rest of the summer be?" she said once.

"There's lots of trees where we're located, Ma," Tom told her, "and the dugouts are cool. I'll help Pa put a floor in ours, like Aunt Jane's gonna have."

Four days later Tom joined his parents' wagon, toward

evening, one of the scout riders rode furiously back to the train to report that a large herd of buffalo had been maddened by hunters and were stampeding in the direction of the wagon train.

Immediately the order was given for the wagons to form as small a circle as possible, to give the wild animals plenty of room to go around.

Tom's small sisters were frightened and his mother spoke sharply to them.

Tom undertook the task of comforting them. "Get way back in the wagon," he told them. "Hang on tight and you'll be all right."

They did as he instructed, looking at him with awe because of his bravery.

The wagons had barely formed, when a roar of running hoofs could be heard, and one or two of the lead buffalo appeared over the knob of a hill. They snorted and swerved aside, and the charging herd behind them followed in a mighty sweep.

Tom could hear women and children's voices raised in frightened cries, and men's answering voices gruff and impatient. He looked at his father, who was crouched by the wheel of his wagon with rifle in hand, and then suddenly he heard his mother groan, and she staggered against the wagon, clutching tightly to a spoke to keep from falling.

"Ma!" he shouted.

She straightened, and stared at him.

"Tom, can you get over to Mrs. Dodge's wagon? Tell her it's the time!"

He waited for no more, but disregarding his father's warning shout, sped into the circles of wagons and began to call, "Dodge? Where's the Dodge wagon? My Ma's having a baby!"

Mrs. Dodge heard him, and immediately went into action.

"Run back and get a fire started," she called. "Get some water out of your Pa's canteen, and be quick!"

And so while the buffalo tore by, and men watched anxiously lest one barge through the protecting ring of the wagons, Ellen Plumb gave birth to another baby boy. It was several weeks later before the question arose as to which state the child had been born in, and when it was discovered that the wagons had been well into Nebraska, the child had the distinction of being the first of the several Plumb children to have been born in the state which was to be the home of the Plumbs for years to come.

They named the baby Lewis. He was a sickly little fellow, crying most of the time, and a constant drain on the already low energies of Tom's mother.

On July the 4th, 1873, Mac and Tom arrived at the cabin of Lont Plumb, and hailed him with the news that Tom's parents were only a mile or so down the creek, and that his mother and the new baby were very ill.

Lont sent Tom for Jane, and rode out to meet his brother. It was a worn out and sick at heart little group that he greeted. Worry over his wife's condition, and the weariness of the long trip had taken the thrill of the new land from Hiram, and the two little girls whimpered on the seat beside him, while Ellen lay with the baby tight in her arms, and beads of the perspiration of pain and heartsick on her smooth brow.

While the few scattered neighboring settlers celebrated in their own hilarious way, the first fourth-of-July celebration of any note in Red Willow county, the Plumbs spent a serious and anxious time. Under Jane's capable hands, Ellen was soon made more comfortable, but the baby continued to fret, and both the girls refused to eat.

Lont and Perry and Hiram lingered long over the simple evening meal, planning, talking, scheming. Mac Pollock listened and eyed Jane in her swift, smooth movements.

Early the next morning a rider came to Lont's dugout door, inquiring for Mac. Lont told him that Mac had just left with Jane and Ellen and the baby in the buckboard, for Jane's new home.

"You a friend of Mac's?" queried Lont.

"Knew him back at Danville. We rode out from Iowa together in Gene Dolph's train. My name's Jack Langley."

"You must be the feller Hi was telling us about last night. You and your sister come out alone, didn't ya?"

"We're all that's left in our family. Mother and Father died during the lean years in Wisconsin. Thought we'd see what we could do out here. We don't have much money. Em thought she'd see if she couldn't start a school. What do you think of the idea? Enough kids around to make it possible, or pay?"

"Might be, come fall. How old's your sister?"

"Seventeen, but she's smart. Knows more about addin' and subtractin' than I do."

"Whyn't you ride down to Jane--that's my sister--and ask her what she thinks? My brother, Hi, has a couple of little girls, and then there's Tom. You met Tom."

Langley nodded. "Don't seem like a boy who'd be much interested in schoolin', in a school house, I mean," he grinned.

Lont nodded, "You're probably right there. But Hi'll see to it he gets some. The boy's too smart for his age."

"Where does your sister live?"

"You gotta follow the creek, about five miles down. You passed it on the way up, but it's closer to the creek than you musta come. You'll find Mac there, no doubt. Come back again," he called, as Langley started to ride away. "I'll be glad to meet your sister."

Mac and the buckboard he drove had just arrived at Jane's door when Langley caught up with them. He sang out a greeting, and then stopped as suddenly as though someone

had stepped sharply on his toe.

He stared at the young woman Mac was lifting down from the wagon seat. Mac caught his look and stiffened. His brief introduction was abrupt.

"Jane, this is Jack Langley. Jack, Miss Jane Plumb."

Jack swept off his hat, and dismounted to come toward Jane. She blushed under his steady gaze, and turning in her confusion, caught her skirt on the wheel, making it necessary for her to stop still. Jack was swift to loosen her, and as he did so his eyes compelled hers to look at him. It was a deep, steady look they gave each other, and then Mac called to him.

"Give me a hand with Mrs. Plumb, Jack."

Jane reached up for the baby, while Jack lifted Ellen in his strong arms, and followed Jane into her home.

"Here, put her down carefully. Mary, Alice, get Aunt Jane some wood chips, quick. Thank you, Mac," she turned to him. "I think I can manage, now. Will you tell Andy to come with the mail today? I won't have time to do it. I'll be glad when they get the new postoffice."

"I have a sister, Miss Plumb," Jack said. "She'd be glad to come over to help awhile. Shall I get her?"

Once more their eyes met, and Mac Pollock suddenly moved out of the doorway where he had stationed himself and went out doors.

"It would be nice of her to come, Mr. Langley. My

brother's wife is quite sick, and it's a comfort to have another woman in case she gets worse. Does she ride well?"

Jack laughed, and nodded. "Em's good on a horse, all right. We'll come back this afternoon. Good-bye."

She looked at him. "Goodbye." Suddenly he smiled, and caught her hand.

"Goodbye, Jane Plumb!"

After he had gone, she busied herself with ministrations to Ellen, but often her mind was filled with visions of his brown, curling hair, his clean shaven face, so different from most of the men Jane knew who wore the popular beards hiding their chins. He looked so young, so boyish that way! Then she thought of Mac Pollock, and for the first time the significance of his sudden departure struck her. Mac had not wanted Jack Langley to look at her as he had, or as she had returned the look!

When Jack returned later that afternoon she had regained her composure, and greeted him, and his sister Emma, with a warm friendliness, but she avoided Langley's eyes.

Emma Langley was a beautiful young girl, with curling brown hair, like her brother's, and dark, expressive eyes. The ease with which she lifted much of the work from Jane's shoulders, was gratifying to the latter woman. Ellen seemed no better. She was listless, and refused to help herself. The baby, under Emma's kind and capable hands, seemed more contented. Ellen was not able to feed the child,

and Em succeeded in getting the little fellow to drink some sweet milk which had come from Jane's lone cow, a gentle old bossy, who gave an abundance of rich milk. The milk proved to be too rich for the child's weak stomach, and he could not digest it. He began to cry pitifully with pains of indigestion. Jane had no medicine to relieve the child, but they coaxed him to drink a bit of warm water, which caused him to vomit. He then seemed to rest easier.

The next morning it was necessary to wash clothes, and Jane and Emma, seeking relief from the heat, brought their tubs out into the shade of the yard trees.

About eleven o'clock Jane, who had a large stone in the yard, decided to bring the pot of beans out there and cook them over a campfire. When the washing was finished, the two women left their beans to cook, and went in to see about Ellen. Presently the noise of horses running attracted them to the door. A buffalo came lunging down over the bank, with two Indians on horses after him, shooting. The buffalo jumped over the crude fire, knocking over the pot of beans, spilling them all. The animal circled on, and went up over the hill again, the Indians in mad pursuit. Jane and Emma stood almost paralyzed with fright. In a few minutes both Indians came back. One went over to the fire and began to fix it up, speaking rapidly in a language neither woman could understand. The other one had a chunk of fresh buffalo meat from their kill, and he

approached the two frightened women, presenting them with his gift.

They were alone the rest of the day, and their fright did not wear off.

"I wish Jack would come!" Em said, and though Jane did not voice it, she wished so too, with all her heart.

That night the baby became steadily worse. Jane turned away from the mute appeal in Ellen's eyes. The child's small body was wringing wet with sweat, and they had to keep him bundled tightly. Jane and Emma took turns holding him, as he seemed more contented that way. Once, Em urged Jane to try for sleep, and she had just dozed away when the younger woman's frightened voice aroused her.

"He's having convulsions, Jane! What'll we do?"

Jane caught the baby to her. "Jack said you could ride. Can you find my brother's place after night? Tell him to get a doctor!"

"I don't know. I've never been there, I might get lost. Shall I ride down the creek to the Wilson's?"

"Yes, yes! Please hurry. The nearest doctor is Indianola! Are you scared to go alone?"

Em nodded, as she pulled on her clothes. Then her eyes widened with horror as she looked at the child with which Jane was working. He had begun to vomit, his small frame caught in a convulsive tremor. Ellen begged for him, and Em had to force her back into bed.

Presently Jane said softly, "You needn't go, Em. It's too late now," and Ellen sobbed once and lay white and pitifully still.

As soon as day break arrived, Em found her way to Perry's dugout, where Hiram was staying, and told them of the child's death. The big man's first words were for Ellen, and learning that she was as well as could be, he buried his face in his hands.

They buried the little boy that same afternoon. Ellen didn't try to watch them. She took one long, lingering look at the little body, and turned her face to the wall. He was her second child to be buried in a new strange land, with no coffin, without even a minister to bless him. Hiram dug the grave on a corner of his land, and placed a staked fence around the little mound.

The remainder of July was stifling hot, with fiercely blowing winds. The crops were badly damaged, but not hopelessly as yet.

Tom and his father worked rapidly on a dugout which must house the family for the coming winter. Tom was unable to keep his promise to his mother to put in a floor. Ellen was better now, and seemed to take more interest in her new home. There was plenty of work for all. Even the little girls had to take a bucket and help pick the blister bugs from the potato vines. The ash colored bugs came in droves, and despair for the winter's supply of the much

needed food came to the settlers. But the bugs disappeared almost as rapidly as they had come, leaving only a small amount of damage.

The long siege of work had become monotonous to Tom. He missed his carefree days of the early spring. The work irked him, and sometimes he rode away from Lont's early in the morning, down to the new fort, or to a neighbor's to talk and loaf, returning to receive a severe scolding from his father and mother. But the scolding was not effective, and again he would go away, leaving his father to work on the dugout alone, or with the help of Lont or Perry, as they were able to spare the time. Tom was sometimes repentent for these times of revolt, and then he would work with tireless energy, but he could not be counted on to be of help when he might be most needed.

His father could not understand his feelings, and became angry with him and refused to talk. Once he made the threat to kill Scott if Tom did not change, and Tom overheard the remark.

"You kill my dog, and by God, I'll----!"

"Tom!" Mac Pollock rebuked the boy.

It was the beginning of a strange breach which was to come between Tom and his father, and which was to last a lifetime.

During the month of August a tragedy occurred which was to instill within Tom an intense hatred for the Sioux

Indians, a hatred which he was never to lose.

The Pawnees had gone north of the Republican river on another of their buffalo hunts. The country was covered with the animals and their kill was great. With horses and ponies loaded heavily with the meat and skins of about eight hundred buffalo, they started back south. On the way they met several white men who were also hunting buffalo. The men told them that their old enemies, the Sioux, were hunting on the divide between the Republican and the Frenchman river. Because these men wanted to cover the territory which the Sioux inhabited, they persuaded the Pawnees to return and drive out the Sioux. The willing Pawnees followed the whites' directions, recrossing the Republican and travelling far enough north so as to approach the canon above the Sioux. They rode up the canon some eight or ten miles in order to reach the divide above. It was their intention to ride down in a surprise attack on the other tribe, but the Sioux had seen them! The Pawnees numbered about two hundred and fifty men, one hundred women and fifty children. The Sioux, numbering six hundred, and coming from the Ogallala and Brule bands, concealed themselves in the draws on both sides of the canon, and waited until the unsuspecting Pawnees were in their very midst. Then with ear-splitting yells and deadly flying arrows they attacked. The surprised Pawnees attempted to resist, and it was a terrific battle, but futile on the part of the

Pawnees from the very start. Soon the Pawnees fled, to avoid being annihilated. They abandoned all of their possessions, including their winter's provisions, which they left strewn upon the ground. The meat they cut from the horses, slashing at the ropes which held it as they sped in hopeless effort to escape the fierceness of their enemy. The ponies that were thus set free of their load ran in terror with the other horses. The women and children suffered most at the hands of the Sioux, since the latter made no effort to spare either. They took deadly aim at all.

When the news came south to Tom and the others, the men formed a party to ride north to the canon to see the devastation. Tom was among the first to start out. Again he went against his father's will, but this did not dampen his adventurous spirits, nor his intense hatred for the Indian tribe who had done the massacre. Tom was horrified at the number of dead Pawnees strewn along the canon bed. Some he recognized, and he had to turn his face away from the sight. There were large quantities of abandoned buffalo meat, and this the settlers loaded onto their horses. Tom secured a large chunk and brought it back to Jane's cabin.

Word was spreading that the government had known of the whereabouts of the Sioux, and had sent men to warn the Pawnees of the danger. Major Russell, of the regular

army, with sixty privates and twenty scouts, was camped within a few miles of the scene of the massacre, and when the news of the battle reached him he started his soldiers in hot pursuit of the Sioux. When the Sioux discovered that the soldiers were after them, they fled, not knowing that there was only a small number of white men, in comparison to their number. When the major visited the scene of the conflict he found indescribable conditions of carnage and disorder, and his report sent back to the government contained an appeal for more adequate protection for the friendly Indian tribes and the settlers in the Beaver valley.

Toward the middle of September, Hiram finished the work on the dugout, and moved his family into it. He had fashioned the beds out of the cottonwoods which grew outside his dugout door, and Tom had made his mother a rough table, and two chairs. Boxes were used also as chairs, and as a cooking table. The one luxury which Hiram had been able to assure, was a fairly large cooking range, with an oven for baking the many needed loaves of bread.

Soon after the family had moved, another battle had to be fought by the settlers. Grasshoppers began to come in thickly. They came onto Hiram's land one day about noon, as the family were gathered around the dinner table. A cloud seemed suddenly to have been drawn across the sun, darkening it. Hiram and Ellen stared at one another for a moment at this new tragedy, and then Ellen grabbed some

sacks and hustling Tom into the garden, ordered him to cover the few remaining cabbages. But it was impossible, so they pulled the vegetables and piled them as close as they could, while Hiram went after a load of hay to cover them. Tom and his father worked all the night trying to cover the melon vines with the ripened melons on them. It was a useless task, for in the morning every melon had been ruined, while the insects had not even touched the vines themselves. Tom had time to wonder what the vines must taste like that the grasshoppers would not eat them.

But again providence seemed on the side of Hiram Plumb, for as the blister bugs had done, the grasshoppers left when the first strong wind blew from the north. However, when the hay was removed from the cabbages, bushels of grasshoppers were found to have crawled into it, and Ellen had to fight them off with brushes.

But despite these hardships, the Beaver valley settlers for the most part, continued to stay on. The fall of the year found most of the heavy work done, and when September had passed on into October, and the children could be spared from the work at home, Emma Langley began her first term of school teaching, with Tom, among several other youngsters, a most reluctant pupil.

CHAPTER V

When Jane Plumb had come to the Beaver valley with her two brothers in the early spring of 1872, there had been no means of getting the mail to the settlers who lived west and south of Indianola. At the insistance of these few scattered persons, Jane had applied to Washington and had received permission to open a postoffice. When the papers had come giving her the authority, she had established a postoffice in her small dugout. It was a "Federal Building," in a couple of pine boxes. When the federal government asked for a name of this new venture, Jane sent in "Wild Turkey," and for the remainder of that year, and through the next, mail for settlers along the Beaver had come to Jane's cabin addressed to "Wild Turkey." When Andy Nightengail had begun to carry the mail in his buckboard, early in the spring of 1873, he had delivered it to Jane's dugout, and picked up what had been left there. Then Ren Wilson had decided to build up a town around the camp where he and his brother Brick and Andy had settled. Ren applied to Washington for permission to handle the mail, and upon receiving it, the town of Wilsonville had its first beginning. Jane was glad enough to be relieved of her duties, but Andy was insulted and hurt. He had worked hard, carrying letters, bundles, or passengers, if they desired, in his buckboard

mail "coach."

With the coming of more families, Wilsonville grew rapidly, though the older settlers at first resented its growth, and still called their postoffice "Wild Turkey."

Andy, for a time, continued to carry mail to certain persons on what he called his "route", appearing about twice a week at their dugout doors, where he was always welcomed joyously, and if it were near a meal time, always invited to stay and eat with the family.

It was on one of these trips that he arrived at Jane's home one day about noon. A pony was tied to the stone in the yard, and Andy recognized it as belonging to Jack Langley. Jane and Jack had heard him and came out to meet him. One look at their faces told him that both were exceedingly happy. Jack tied Andy's horses to the stone hitch and insisted that he stay for dinner, saying that Jane had promised to bake corn bread. At Andy's inquiring gaze, Jane blushed prettily.

"I'm testing out her cookin' skill, Andy." Jack laughed. "You see, I think maybe I'm goin' to want to eat her cookin' the rest of my life. Got to see if I think I can stand it!"

Jane ran back into the dugout, leaving Jack and Andy to laugh at her confusion.

"I'm about the happiest feller in this here United States, Andy. I knew the first time I set eyes on Miss

Jane Plumb I was gonna change her name as soon as I could if she'd have me. There's only one thing," his eyes clouded suddenly, "I'm afraid Mac's not likin' it very much."

"Mac know you're gonna be married?" Andy asked.

Jack shook his head. "Not yet, he doesn't. But he knows I love Jane, and I think he suspects she loves me, too. Mac's my best friend, Andy, and it's a hell of a thing to do to your best friend. I wouldn't want to hurt Mac for all the gold in California. I guess that's the way things happen, though. I came out here in the first place because Mac wanted me to come so bad. Wrote me several times before Em and I made up our minds to come."

"Jane know how Mac felt about her?" Andy asked.

Jack shook his head. "I think she kinda had an idea, but Mac never said anything. Makes it that much harder. Jane thinks a lot of Mac, but now can't any of us talk it over 'cause there just ain't anything we can say to Mac."

"I don't know of anybody I'd hate to see hurt worse'n I would Mac," Andy mused. "He's about the squarest feller around these parts. Mac's everybody's friend. They don't come any better'n Mac."

"I know," Jack said. "Mac's been my friend since I was knee high to a grasshopper. I could always talk to Mac. That's why it's so damned hard now!"

They went into the dugout, where Jane was working over the hot stove. Her face was flushed and beautiful. Andy

could well understand the love of the two life-long friends for this lovely girl. He shook his head over the problem, and turned the conversation to a lighter vein.

"Jack tells me you're to be Mrs. Jack, Jane. That right?"

Jane smiled at him, and turned her gaze toward Langley. Andy felt the spark that seemed to come from one to the other.

"I guess that's right, Andy. That's the way we both feel. Will you give us your blessing?"

"Bless you, Miss Jane, you've got my blessin' and everybody's around here, I'd say. H'm, that corn bread smells mighty good!"

After the meal was over, Jack decided to ride along beside Andy's buckboard down to meet Em at her school house. A horse was tied to a tree in the school yard, and they recognized it as Mac Pollock's. Andy and Jack sent puzzled looks at one another. Riding up to the door, Jack called out Em's name, but it was Mac who came to the door.

"Howdy, Jack," he said. "Your sister seems to have had a bad day. She's in there cryin' her heart out."

"What-----!" Jack was off his horse and inside the little frame building that had been hurriedly constructed to serve the needs of Em and her pupils.

Em sat with her head on the box that served as her

desk, her shoulders shaking with uncontrolled sobs. Mac followed Jack back through the doorway, and said softly.

"I met Tom down the road awhile ago, lookin' madder'n a wet hen, and walkin' along like fury. When I asked him, he first said he was mad 'cause Dan broke loose and went home. I told him I was goin' up to see Jane, and he could ride double with me that far. Then he said he wasn't goin' home yet, 'cause he didn't want to see anybody right then. I seen right away something was wrong, so I made him tell me. I can get most anything outa Tom if I talk rough enough to 'im. He told me there's been trouble here to-day, and I sorta figured Em might be feelin' bad. A rough bunch like she's got to handle ain't no fun, I'm bettin'."

Jack approached his sister, and at the touch of his hand on her shoulder, she started and looked up. Seeing her brother she threw herself into his arms. Jack's eyes met Mac's over her shoulder and he grinned.

"Did she fall into your arms, too, Mac?"

Mac laughed, "Nope. Told me to go away and let her alone. Said I always stood up for that young hellion, anyway, and I'd find some excuse for him. I couldn't even get out of her what Tom had done."

At the mention of Tom's name, Em raised her head, her eyes blazing at Jack.

"He can't come back!" she declared. "I won't have him here. He makes the others mean and restless. He--He pulled

my hair, and then laughed!"

Mac passed his hand over his jaw to hide the smile that almost broke through, while Jack looked exaggeratedly concerned and queried Em further concerning Tom's actions.

"He does nothing but sit and waste his time whittling," she exclaimed. "Look." She pointed at one corner of her desk on which were a miniature arrow and bow, a small box elaborately carved, and what looked to be the beginning of the frame of a tiny violin.

"When I scold him he sneers at me, and then the other children snicker. When he's stubborn they won't any of them do what I say. And he's stubborn most of the time. I thought I could handle him without going to his father, but I won't have him back here another day. I won't!"

"Say!" Mac spoke suddenly. "These things are good!" He held in his hand the small violin which Tom had fashioned out of a piece of cottonwood.

Em sent a resentful look toward him. "I knew you'd hold up for him, Mac Pollock. You think that boy can't do any meanness."

"Oh, no I don't, Em. I know very well he's full of the devil. But this whittlin' is good."

"Well, he can do it someplace else besides in my school room!"

"Come, Em, I'll get your pony," urged Jack.

"I'll get it," Mac said, starting for the door. He

found Andy still waiting to find the cause of Em's distress, and Mac noticed that Andy, too, found the incident more amusing than otherwise. When Em saw Andy, she decided to ride with him in the wagon, and lead her pony. All the way to Brick Wilson's, where she was staying, she found a sympathetic, if uncommunicative listener, in Andy. She might have been very angry had she but known that he was secretly deeply amused at her tirade.

When Em had ridden away with Andy, the two friends were left to continue the journey alone. When Mac had looked at his watch and discovered that it was quite late, he had decided to ride back to Wilsonville with Jack.

"I was goin' up to see Jane," he said, glancing sideways at Jack.

At the mention of her name, Jack suddenly became self-conscious in Mac's presence. He said nothing, and presently Mac went on. "I--wanted to ask her something."

"Oh---?"

"Maybe I ought to ask you, instead, Jack?"

"Maybe I ought to tell you, before you ask me, Mac, that--that Jane and me, that is, I mean, we---. Damn it, Mac, you know I think as much of you as if you were my own brother, but---, well, I love Jane."

"I see." Mac was silent. Then he asked quietly, "And Jane? Does she love you?"

Jack nodded. "Please God, Mac, she does. I--I don't

know how it happened to be me she cares for, Mac. The good Lord knows I'm not worthy of her, not half as worthy as you are. But I love her."

"And you're gonna be married?"

Jack nodded.

"When?"

"We haven't said for sure, yet. Sometime come spring."

"I see." Again the silence, until Jack turned to face his friend. Their eyes met in a direct gaze, but neither one wavered.

"I'd like to say I'm sorry, Mac. Words don't help much, I know, but I'd just like you to know. I've loved Jane from the first moment I set eyes on her. I know that's old stuff, too, but it's true. I wish it didn't have to be this way. I ain't gonna go into how much our friendship means to me, and all that. I guess you know that already. I'd like to have you for a friend the rest of my life, but if you don't feel that way, I'll understand. I'd like you to talk to Jane, if you want to. Maybe she'd like to have you."

"Hell, I haven't got anything to say to her now. She knows how I feel about her, anyway. Her takin' you shows how she feels."

"Don't blame Jane, Mac. Maybe she didn't realize you cared anything about her. You never told her, did you? Women are kinda funny; sometimes you gotta tell 'em, and

sometimes they know it 'fore you do yourself."

"I wish to hell she'd never set eyes on you!"

Jack was shaken at the sudden emotion in the big man's voice. He rode his horse close to the other's, and reached a hand out to touch his shoulder.

"Mac----!"

Mac rode with his head lowered, giving no response to Jack's hand. Presently Jack kicked his horse back into the wagon track, and the two rode without speaking.

When they reached Wilsonville, Jack looked once more at his old friend, but finding no relenting in his attitude, he turned his horse into the street which led to Brick Wilson's place, leaving Mac to ride on alone. Had he followed Pollock, he might have wondered at his actions, for Mac did not stop in the village, but rode on out onto the prairie, turning south away from the creek. The night was chilly, but Mac seemed not to notice. Dismounting from his pony, he lay flat upon the cold ground, with his arms folded underneath his head, and stared into the darkness above him. There, in the loneliness of the night, Mac fought the battle which all men disappointed in love must fight. Some win the fight, and others lose. Long into the night Mac stayed there alone. At last he rode back into the town. A light still burned in one of the windows of Brick's house. Seeing it, Mac hesitated a moment, and then rode toward it. It was Jack who came to the door in

answer to his knock. The sight of Mac plainly startled him.

"Mac, is something wrong?"

"Not any more," Mac answered, stepping in through the door. "I just wanted to tell you that."

They stood for a time, each searching the other's eyes, and then their hands met in a firm handclasp.

Then Jack said, "Better stay the night here, Mac. You can sleep with me. I--I couldn't sleep, so I hadn't gone to bed."

They did not talk a great deal as they undressed, but after a while, Mac chuckled.

"Em get over her upset?"

Jack shook his head. "I'm afraid not. She still doesn't want him back in school."

"May be that's just as well. Boys like Tom don't get much out of school books anyway. But that whittlin' of his is good. He'd ought to have a chance to do that if he's got the hankerin'."

"If I know Tom, he'll do what he wants to, without askin' leave of any one, least of all his school teacher!"

"I guess I'll talk to Hi. Maybe he'll let me take Tom in hand for awhile. I like the boy, and I'd like to see him doin' the things he's got a knack for."

Thus it happened that Tom's formal education was ended. Hi and Ellen were very angry about Em's complaints against Tom, and when Mac asked if he might take Tom with

him on his various trips and give the boy a chance to do the things he seemed to have a natural ability to do, they were relieved to have the problem so simply settled. And so was begun the partnership, both in friendship, which was already deeply rooted, and in business, which was to last throughout the life of Tom Plumb.

Through the rest of the winter, Tom and Mac spent much time in hunting and trapping, and in the long, cold evening Tom worked on a violin, large enough to play upon. Mac had secured for him an old violin frame from a man named Jolin Cave, who lived along the Beaver. Tom made the keys and tail piece from buffalo horns which he had polished until they resembled ebony. The bridge and finger board he fashioned from buffalo bones, white as ivory. His mother boiled the buffalo feet and gave him a quantity of neats' foot oil with which to keep it oiled.

When the instrument was completed, he tried to play it. There was no one to give him lessons, but with Mac as an interested and patient critic, he sawed out the scales, and later "Home Sweet Home." Soon he was playing tunes which resembled "Turkey in the Straw," and "Wait for the Wagon," and sometimes "The Old Sod Shanty on the Plains."

Tom was happy. He and Mac lived alone in Mac's sod house, which Mac kept exceptionally clean. Mac prepared their meals, for, of the two tasks, Tom preferred to chop the wood, and do part of the other outside work.

The winter days flew by, and soon it was spring. Early in the spring of the year of 1874 the hot days began, with strong hot blasts of wind, and very little rain.

That spring a census of southwestern Nebraska west of the 100th meridian was taken, and the settlers, men, women, and children, numbered not less than two thousand. Farming operations, for the most part, had been carried on with but indifferent success. In 1872 the area under cultivation had been necessarily restricted, because of Indians. The following year drouth had cut most of the crops short, though some of the settlers, among them the Plumbs, had fared pretty well. And during the summer of 1874, the drouth was even worse, and the grasshoppers came in clouds that darkened the sun and consumed every vestige of vegetation.

The settlers in a new country are usually people of limited means, and under the most favorable circumstances the struggle for existence is severe. The base of supplies for the settlers along the Beaver, for the Fort, and for the town of Indianola, was over a hundred miles away, and the only means of transportation was by wagon. During that summer nothing was grown to eke out the scanty supplies which a few dollars would buy at the base. As the winter approached the settlers faced starvation. The destitution became so appallingly universal during that fall that it began to attract the attention of the "civilized" world.

Congress appropriated one hundred and fifty thousand dollars for the relief of the distressed. Supplies came from every corner of the nation. The settlers were grateful for these hands of charity that were extended, for without the aid, hundreds along the Beaver valley would have literally starved. The War department sent Colonel Dudley to investigate conditions. His report showed that in Red Willow county, out of a total estimated population of eight hundred, five hundred and forty would require aid before the winter was half over; that three hundred would need assistance within twenty days; and that at the time of his visit more than one hundred were either entirely out of food or would be in less than five days.

The Plumb families, and especially Hiram's family, were among those hardest hit. Having raised no crops the preceding year, Hi had had to use what little money he had been able to bring with him when he left Wisconsin. Perry and Lont had one or two cows, and Perry had a yoke of oxen, but the animals were so worn down from starvation, and the hard trips on which they had been used to haul the buffalo carcasses on the buffalo hunts, that they were of very little value. The few hogs belonging to Lont and Hi were mere skeletons, since there had been no corn with which to feed them, and they had had to subsist almost entirely on wild roots which they had found in the bottoms. Hi suggested that they try to sell the hogs, but no one

had any money with which to buy them, or feed to keep them. Lont saw the necessity of keeping what few animals they had in case they might be killed and used for meat. They did butcher two hogs, but the animals had been so long without the necessary food that the meat was almost unpalatable, and would have been had not the families been in such dire hunger.

Since there was no money with which to pay her wages, the settlers had not been able to maintain Em's school, and Em found herself without a means of support. Jack and Jane had married early in the spring, and though Jane welcomed her in their home, there was hardly enough food to do for the two of them, and one more mouth to feed became an almost unbearable burden, especially since Jane needed all the milk and food which could be obtained for her in order to give the child which she was carrying the benefit of a healthy body at birth.

It was to Mac Pollock that Jack finally turned for aid, before the supplies came from the government. Instead of attempting to farm, and seeing his labor burn away in the hot sun or ruined by the devastation of the various insects, Mac spent his time in trapping during the winter, and hunting during the spring and summer. He had an enormous quantity of buffalo hides from animals which he had killed during the early spring and which he was able to sell. The bones he shipped to a carbon factory, receiving

about \$6.50 to \$7.00 a ton for them, about one hundred carcasses being required to make up a ton.

Part of this money he gladly lent to Jack, to buy for Jane the things she most needed. With the coming of the outside supplies, things became a little better for the settlers, but several of the families along the Beaver settlements lost the life of a child, and in some cases, more than one.

In the early April of the next year, Jane gave birth to a baby boy. Jack wanted to name the baby Sidney. A week following the birth of Jane's child, Ellen Plumb gave birth to another baby girl. Ellen named her baby Betsy Jane, in honor of her mother, and of Jane.

It was later in that summer that the mystery of the wagon party which Tom had found the first year he had been in Nebraska was explained. A white man who was employed as an agent on one of the Indian reservations in Oklahoma came to Wilsonville one day, on his way north to the Platte river. Tom was loitering in the streets as the man rode into town, and, like the rest of the curious townspeople, crowded around him. Sometime during the course of the conversation, someone told him about Tom's finding the relics of a lost train. Immediately the man was intensely interested. He asked for Tom, and began to question him carefully.

"I'd like to see the place where you found them," he said finally.

With Mac and several other interested persons, Tom and the man rode out to the place, which was now an open field bordering on a curve of the Beaver and belonging to Tom's father.

"Right here," said Tom, outlining a circle with his heel, "was where we found their camp fire ground. It was burned bare and there was plenty of charcoal still left. You know the buffalo grass will not grow on an old fire place for several years. All around here there were stakes scattered. Probably six or eight big native timber stakes about three or four inches square which seemed to have been put there for some particular reason."

"Section corners!" the man muttered.

"What?"

"Anything else?" the man asked.

"Well, there were a lot of smaller stakes, about like picket-pins. See that sharp bend in the creek about twenty rods south of us? Well, a log g t lodged there, and I found the wagon wheel about half-way of the driftwood, right in the creek bed. On farther down I found the wagons later. One was heavy, and the other a light spring wagon. Lem Daniels got the most of the wagons out and he's still got 'em. I got a spring seat, without the springs. It had bows over it to make a shade for the driver, but they had been broken off."

"Was that all?"

"Right over there to the southeast, on this bank of the creek, Bill Shockley and I, while out hunting and trapping one day, ran onto a wood-rat's house and in it we found several feet of surveyor's chain and twenty or more rim-fire Spencer cartridges. The brass was covered with muck and rust and we thought the powder would be no good, so we tore 'em up and used the bullets to mould balls for our own guns.

"Later I found a silver spoon and an old sword-belt in another wood-rat's house, farther down the creek."

"A surveyor's chain, huh?" queried the man. "It must have been Buck's party."

"Who?" Tom demanded in great excitement.

"The Nelson Buck surveying party which was lost in '69," the man answered. "We could never find any trace of them."

"How did you know about it?"

"I was employed by the government in charge of the Sioux agency in January, beginning 1870. The word came to me from Surveyor General P. W. Hitchcock to make an investigation of a lost surveyor's party. I made all sort of inquiries among the Indians, including 'Spotted Tail', 'Swift Bear', and 'Pawnee Killer', along with several others. I remember when 'Pawnee Killer' arrived at my agency, he and his party all had a lot of United States currency, which they paid over very freely. 'The Killer'

told me of a band of eight white men being killed on Beaver Creek and that three white men were seen escaping at the time of the attack. Later, a son of the man who was directing the party came out and made inquiries among the Indians. He said one squaw told him she saw a surveying party killed by the warriors of her tribe, and she assured him that the 'white-haired man' fought like a tiger and was very brave."

"Did Buck have white hair?"

"His son told us he did. We were never able to locate the exact spot of the killing. 'Spotted Tail' once told us that the bodies of white men could be found near a small stream emptying into the Republican."

"Were they ever found?"

"No. As I recall his directions for traveling to the spot upon leaving the agency were something like this: Starting from North Platte City and traveling south, striking the mouth of Blackwood creek, two miles below Frenchman's creek, across the Republican river, three miles below the mouth of Blackwood creek, and travel south to Beaver creek. The bodies were to be found near where the military road crossed Beaver. All this was told me by my interpreter, but though we sent out a search party we never found anything."

"Who was Nelson Buck?" Mac wanted to know.

"Well, he wrote to the surveyor-general, from Pontiac, Illinois, asking for an appointment to survey Red Willow

and other counties in Nebraska. That letter was dated in December, 1867, and I recall the general saying that he had a letter which Abraham Lincoln had given him several years before, as one of his references. I know Hitchcock wrote back to him and warned him that it would be a hazardous undertaking, and his next letter, dated in February, 1865, indicated to Hitchcock that he expected to have trouble with the Indians."

"Weren't they well outfitted?"

"Buck intended, I suppose, to be able to fully equip his party with the necessary ammunition and materials to defend themselves. Something must have happened to his requisition, because when we were trying to locate the party later, I received a letter from General Livingston, written from Fort Kearney, some time in '70, saying that he had had a communication from Buck in July of '69 asking leave to draw arms as would be needed by such a party. General Livingston stated that the party must have gone on without the arms. The General stated that he sent a letter to Fort McPherson instructing the party to procure their materials there, but we could find no evidence that they had done so. At last, apparently, we've found the answer to the mystery, thanks to you, my boy." The man turned to Tom and laid a hand on his shoulder.

The news of the man's story, and some time later the establishment of the authenticity of it, spread far and

wide in the Beaver valley. Tom was at last the hero he had dreamed of being! Many times he repeated the story the man had told. As often as he could find an interested listener, he began it.

To Tom the years of his life seemed to fly by. He was contented to live with Mac, following the latter in all his ventures. Tom had been concerned, at first, about Pollock's reaction to Jane's marriage to Jack, but finding Mac apparently quite reconciled to it, he gave it no more thought.

Two years after the birth of Betsy Jane, another little girl was born into the Hiram Plumb family, this one being named Susan. When this baby was somewhat over a year old, a new sort of terror came to the Plumbs and the other settlers on the Beaver, and in all southwestern Nebraska.

Word was spread throughout the valley that a band of Cheyenne Indians had escaped from their reservation in Oklahoma, and were headed toward their old hunting grounds. They had been joined by a similar band of the fiercely fighting Sioux.

It was on the fifth day of November, in 1878, that a small neighbor boy, riding hard on a panting pony, arrived at Hiram's door.

"The Indians are coming!" he shouted. "Everybody's goin' down to the Beaver fort!" He rode away as quickly as he had come, leaving behind him a terrified group.

Hiram lost no time in loading his family into the buckboard and with Tom riding Dan, they started for the fort. When they arrived at Wilsonville, they found several families already there. Some of the men had been out scouting and had come back to report that they believed the scare to be a false one. The people decided to all spend the night together, there in the town, and men were designated to make up several watch parties.

The report had come in the first place from a woman who had been found half crazed with fear, wandering among the bushes and weeds along the Sappa creek, near Oberlin, Kansas, located some twenty miles south of the Kansas-Nebraska line. She told the story of the Indians' killing her husband, while she and her two boys had managed to slip out the back way. She had watched the Indians enter her house and bring out a feather bed and rip it open, scattering the feathers while they yelled blood-curdling oaths. Some time during the night, the woman had become lost from the two boys, and when she was found, she was lying on her face, moaning pitifully.

Long into the next day the settlers waited anxiously for the first appearance of the Indians. Not one of the families had thought of bringing food with them, and soon children could be heard crying from hunger. It was Jane who took the situation in hand, and set two women to work mixing vast quantities of biscuits, while she put

others to work peeling potatoes. A good substantial meal was soon prepared, and the people ate hungrily.

Toward the close of the second day, most of the families returned to their homes. Tom rode back ahead of his father and mother, his eyes ever on the alert for any sign of danger, but none came that night, nor at any time during the next three weeks.

Time went on quietly, until one day the word again spread that Indians were headed that way. Once more the trek began toward the Fort. This time Tom refused to go. He watched his father and mother and sisters drive off in the buckboard, and then he mounted Dan and with a two-barrelled shot gun across his knee, he rode slowly along the creek. He rode for about half an hour, walking Dan and listening for any strange sound. Suddenly the pony stiffened and refused to be urged on. Tom dismounted, and leading Dan, he started cautiously forward. Then he saw the Indians! They were crossing the creek, riding as though they were very tired. Their ponies were lathered in sweat. Tom watched them file across, until they were all on the farther side. Then he saw several of the men dismount from their ponies, and gather up bunches of dry twigs and branches. These they set afire and left burning among the trees. Tom was suddenly horribly frightened. The fire shot skyward, borne along by the strong wind which had arisen. At first Tom thought of attempting to

put it out, but he soon realized the futility of this, for the Indians would be sure to see him, and also it would be impossible for a lone boy to stop the blaze that had already started.

Climbing back onto Dan, he urged the pony madly over the trail leading to the Beaver Fort. His shouted message was enough to start every man and woman into action. The fire had spread unbelievably fast, and the settlers tried to start backfires to save their stock and feed, but for the most part the attempt was useless. During the spring, the grass had grown tall, and now in the dry fall, it had dried out, growing up around the trees, and making excellent kindling for the fire, which blazed up into the trees. Much of the stock of the settlers was burned to death, and the rest of the animals were burned so badly that for the most part they had to be killed. The three Plumb brothers lost all their feed and stock, and again loss and starvation stared them in the face.

As there was no doubt that the Indians had started the fire, the settlers applied to the government for pay for the loss, and a man was sent to look over the evidence, but nothing ever came to the settlers from his report.

Again the men wrote asking for aid, and again a man came to see what damage had been done. This procedure was gone through for the third time, but the only person who ever received any benefit was the woman whose husband

had been killed in the earlier scare. This woman received one thousand dollars, but she never fully regained complete use of her senses following the tragedy, and lived for years practically an invalid, cared for by her two sons who had escaped death from the hands of the Cheyennes.

Tom and Mac and Jack managed to keep the Plumb families from starving to death, by hunting daily for what food could be killed or trapped.

The spring seemed endlessly long in coming, but at last it arrived, and with its coming, brought hope and encouragement back to the hearts of the people.

Once more Ellen Plumb gave birth to a child, a girl named Belle. This baby was the last of the Plumb children, though both Ellen and Hiram hoped for another boy for several years. When the new baby was not quite four months old, Ellen saw another of her family buried. The little girl, Susan, was bitten by a poisonous rattler, and though Hiram sucked the poison from her small foot, and placing her in the buckboard, lashed the horses in a mad gallop to Indianola, all efforts to save her life were futile, and she died, suffering horribly before the end came. This time, Tom made a crude coffin of cottonwood boards, and a young man from Indianola came to conduct the brief funeral services.

CHAPTER VI

In the spring of the year 1880, Hiram Plumb constructed for his family a sod house. It was a poorly built structure, with a thatched roof, the windows and doors being put in place with cottonwood boards which Hiram sawed and covered with heavy burlap.

Ellen's girls were growing older, and wanted new and more clothes. They became a problem to clothe, for Hiram could not afford material for each to have more than two dresses in a year. One of these was made from muslin, which Ellen colored a beautiful plum color with dye boiled from sumac bulbs. This dress was worn on Sundays and for special occasions. The other was for "every day", and was made out of rough denim material.

Tom was now nineteen. He was straight shouldered and handsome, but indifferent about his appearance. His oldest sister, Alice, was now old enough to be critical about her own appearance, and even more so of Tom's. Sometimes she wept bitterly because, at fifteen, it was tragic to her that her clothes were not as stylish as some of the girls in Indianola or at Fort Beaver were able to afford. Also, Tom shamed her by his rough appearance on his frequent trips to these places. Neither Tom nor Mac Pollock, who, though older, was still thin and hard of muscle,

bothered themselves about their clothing. When it was necessary for them to ride into town, they went in whatever they happened to be wearing at the time.

Mac had bought a good deal of land along the Beaver, part of it from settlers who had been forced to move out during the early "lean" years. Now he was engaged in the business of raising hogs on an enormous scale. He was a rich man, judged by the standard of the settlers. He found in Tom an able and eager partner.

That year Em Langley married Lont Plumb. After her first futile attempt at teaching, Em had been offered a position at Fort Beaver, and had continued to teach there until her marriage. A year following, their baby daughter was born. They named her Vanche.

The months flew on into years, and more children came to both Em and Jane. The Beaver valley was filling up with settlers and the towns continued to grow. The government discontinued Fort Beaver, and then the people living around that part of the valley named the place Beaver City and it continued to grow as a thriving little town.

In the early spring of 1887, the Burlington Railroad Company finished a survey and commenced building a railroad up the Beaver valley. At the time the survey was made, there was provision made for the laying out of another town, to be situated between Beaver City and Wilsonville. However, trouble arose between the Lincoln Land

Company and the man who had agreed to furnish the land, and so 240 acres was bought of Gene Dolph, and the railroad survey was changed to the south side of the creek, to the west of Wilsonville. The new town was named Danbury Station.

It was Joe Phillips who came over from Indianola and put up a small store building. He brought with him a wagon load of merchandise, mostly groceries, and the settlers soon came to appreciate the new town.

The next fall, a man named John Spear commenced digging a well for the town. The well, when finished, was about 40 feet deep with a bucket at each end of a rope which ran over a pulley overhead--an empty bucket went down and the other came up full of water. For several months, this well was the only protection against fire and thirst that the people had.

Soon other buildings began to grow up, and other businesses to flourish. Gene Dolph built a large two-story hotel building and he, with Mrs. Dolph, opened a hotel which was a home for the weary and hungry for a number of years. For miles around the hospitality and good food of "Ma" Dolph were praised highly.

A few days after the beginning of the town, the railroad company had set off a boxcar, and this had been used as a station-house, until a frame building was built for that purpose in the year 1889. A year before the

building of the station, the Bank of Danbury was organized, and that same year a postoffice was established, and called "Danbury Station." Later the word "Station" was dropped, and henceforth the name of "Danbury" was used.

Mac made arrangements with "Uncle Bill" Annis, who had set up the first butcher shop, to furnish the shop with the necessary hog meat, and Hiram Plumb sold the butcher buffalo-grass-beef, which "Uncle Bill" sold at ten cents ~~per~~ pound.

A school house and church followed during the year 1889, with a young man named Seth Parsons as teacher in the little 24x40 school building, and a minister named Gettis doing the work of laying the stone foundation of the church building himself. Before the latter was built, the church meetings had been held in an empty store-room in the Dolph building, often using planks laid over beer kegs for seats. Through the kindness of a young man named Joe Cass, who had started the first lumber company in the town, the first Sunday School was organized in the lumber yard, under the lumber sheds.

Also, in 1889, The Danbury News was started, with Bill Carpenter as editor, but the next year, like most of the crops in the valley, the newspaper venture dried up.

The new little village was not without medical aid, for a middle-aged man, carrying a black bag of doctor's instruments appeared one day, and putting out his sign,

30
began a practice which lasted a quarter of a century, ending when the man's hair was pure white, and poor health would not permit him to minister to the needs of others. The doctor's name was Moore, and "Old Doc" Moore became one of the best loved of men in the Beaver valley.

The village was incorporated several years later, in 1898, with capable men acting as chairman and trustees, and under their engineering a town hall was soon built. And so another little town, the most prosperous of them all, grew up along the Beaver.

In 1897, Hiram Plumb had built for his family a very splendid frame house out of white pine boards. The new house was located just a little east of the place where the first crude dugout had been, and later the "soddy". Ellen was happy in the furnishing of her new home, but to the Plumb girls the most wonderful piece of furniture was the Singer Sewing machine which Hiram gave to Alice because he could understand the desire of a young girl's heart for pretty dresses. Lucy Dolph sent a Bulric dress pattern over from her store in Indianola, and Jane made a present of a bolt of muslin material. Alice loved to sew and made for herself and her mother and sisters as many dresses as the material would make. She also made the curtains and drapes for the new house.

The house was elaborately built for the year 1897. It was a large house, to accommodate Hiram's large family.

91

There were seven large rooms, a pantry, and a porch running around two sides of the house. The rooms consisted of a kitchen, a dining room, and a living room, with four bedrooms making up the rest. Soon after the house was built, Hiram provided a barn and a small milk house, for he had managed to build up a herd of splendid milk cows which he milked with the help of Betsy Jane and Nelle, while Mary helped Ellen with the creams and cheeses. These they sold in Danbury, and in this way the family lived fairly easily.

Alice Plumb was twenty-five now, and soon to be married to a young man named Charley Wade. Ellen was not too happy over the betrothal, for Charley had one weakness, which Ellen feared would lead to others.

Though the young man seemed to care very deeply for Alice he continued to drink quite heavily at times. Several times Tom had rescued him from the barroom and had jerked him out into the night air just before insensibility from too much drink had overtaken him. But the marriage date had been set, and Alice spent most of her days sewing rapidly on the new sewing machine in preparation for the event.

Tom teased her unmercifully. The brother and sister had quarrelled in brother-and-sister fashion all their lives, ever since, as Alice once remarked, Tom had pulled her "pig-tail" the first time she could remember him

distinctly. Now, when Tom made one of his infrequent visits to the new home, and found her sewing on a dress, or working over her handwork, he always managed to endanger something of her priceless things so that she had to jump to the rescue, often times assailing Tom with her clenched fists, and chasing him out of the house with screams and tears. Mary, the next sister, always sympathized with Alice, but Betsy Jane laughed in fiendish glee at her brother's antics, while little Nelle watched her brother with unconcealed adoration in her eyes.

The wedding was one of the largest affairs in the history of the valley. Alice had chosen to be married in the living room of her father's home, and the room glowed with an abundance of flowers. Lucy Dolph brought a beautiful basket of crimson double geraniums, and Jane supplied white roses and pansies from her flower garden. Alice's dress was made of pearl silk, which Mac had brought back to her from North Platte, made in princess style with a flowing veil.

The guests came from far and wide. Jane and Jack came with their family the night before the wedding, so that Jane could help Ellen on the great day. Em, with her second husband, Perry, whom she had married upon the sudden death of Lont four years after they had been married, arrived with her brood of five children. The Stilgebourers, the Dolphs, the Wilsons, all the families who had known the

Plumbs and lived along the Beaver as neighbors together, through the good and the bad years, were invited.

Ellen was misty eyed, and silent. It was her first child to marry, and though she had lived through the years of death for some of her children, through drouths and hunger and privation, this now seemed the hardest to bear. Had she been able to trust the man her daughter was marrying, she told herself, she might then have felt better about the marriage, but her heart seemed sick and heavy within her body, and sometimes at night Hiram had heard her weeping softly into her pillow. Hiram had heard, but he had said nothing, for he thought he understood how her mother heart felt about losing one of the jewels which had become so closely bound in love.

Reverend Jim Gettis, from Danbury, performed the ceremony, and even when the final words were said, Ellen could scarcely believe it to be true.

That evening, following the day of merrymaking and celebration, Ellen stood in the doorway of the new house and watched her daughter ride away with her husband in the splendid new buggy which had been Hiram's wedding gift, to her new home on the ridge, some thirty miles away, across the border line in Kansas.

The sisters left at home were very lonely without Alice and the realization of Ellen's grief made them even more unhappy.

In the meantime, strange thoughts were running through Tom's head. His sister's marriage brought to him the realization that he was twenty-nine years old; and that he did not have a great deal to show for those years. These were not thoughts that Tom would have admitted to anyone, unless it might be Mac. Tom was fully aware of the fact that any success he had made in life, as far as material gain was concerned, was due to Mac's never-ending driving power. It was Mac's initiative which kept Tom going, which prevented his giving way to the urge to drop everything, to loaf lazily in the warm sun in summer, or drowse by the stove with his pipe in winter.

An observer would have stated that Tom was satisfied that this should be, but the facts of the matter were that he was often bothered by this seeming inertia which enveloped him at times. Occasionally he was fired with ambition to begin and carry to completion some undertaking, but before the end had arrived, he would become tired and bored with the whole thing.

One day Tom went home to see his parents. He found his mother busily engaged in canning wild plums which the girls had gathered along the creek. The plums were boiled and rubbed through a cullender, then canned into delicious plum butter. Sometimes, they were merely soaked and dried, then canned in sugar to be used during the winter as stewed fruit. One look at Ellen's face told Tom that

something was wrong. In answer to his question, she told him,

"It's your father, Thomas. That ball in his leg is paining him so much."

- "Where is he?"

"He's in there on the bed. I don't think he's been able to sleep."

Hiram tried to get up as Tom came in the door, but the effort was too great. Hiram had been wounded at the Battle of Antietam by a minie rifle ball in his left thigh, and he had carried it since then. It had often caused him much discomfort, and sometimes great lameness.

"Leg hurt you pretty much, does it, Pa?"

"Like hell," the big man answered.

Tom did not know what to say to his father. Since the early days there had grown up between them a strained feeling in each other's presence. Hiram resented the fact that his only son had not been content to help with the work on the farm, and had preferred the company of another man to that of his father. Tom had felt the misunderstanding and resentment of his father, but never had he been able to talk with him in an effort to arrive at a better understanding. Tom would have gone away again without staying long, if his mother had not urged him strongly to stay for the evening meal. His mother's food tasted especially good to him. She had made him a "Johnnie" cake out of

Indian maize, and with it she served his favorite wild currant jelly.

His sisters were talking excitedly about a taffy pull which was to be held at Jane's home that evening. Tom could scarcely realize that even his youngest sister was old enough to have a beau to escort her to the community functions.

"There's to be a dance next week, too!" Betsy Jane told him, "and Gene Dolph is looking for some one to play the fiddle in Joe Johns' place. Why don't you come, Tommy?"

Tom laughed, but the idea stayed in his mind,

"Where's the dance to be?" he asked.

"We're going to meet in the grove first and sing songs. Then we'll all go over to Stones', those who want to dance, and the older folks can go home if they want to. Please come!"

Betsy Jane had always been nearer her brother than any of the other girls. She did not feel self-conscious in his presence, as they did, nor was she afraid to say the things to him which she wished to say.

When Tom went out doors as he was leaving, she followed him and continued to urge him to attend the community gathering. He gave her no definite answer, but he didn't refuse, and as he rode away the thought remained that perhaps he might begin to be more sociable among the younger people, for most of those his own age were already married and firmly established in their own homes.

CHAPTER VI I

The next day Tom persuaded Mac to ride into Danbury. As he suspected, Joe Johns was in Murphy's saloon. He approached Johns.

"Hear you ain't gonna play for the Stones' dance."

"Nope." Johns looked at him in surprise. Tom Plumb had never been a friendly sort of person at any time, and for him to start a conversation with any one except his own friends was unusual.

"Found anyone to take your place yet?"

Johns again shook his head wonderingly. "You want to play?"

Tom hesitated even then. "Well, thought I might, if they need someone."

"Sure," Johns said, "I'll tell Dolph tonight. He's gonna be glad to have ya'."

When Tom told Mac about the dance, the older man glanced at him sharply, and said nothing.

Finally Tom asked, "What do ya' think of it, Mac?"

"Why, I think it's great. You can play better'n any body I've ever heard. Never could figure out why you'd never play around places."

"Like to go with me and look on, Mac?"

"Might."

Having once made up his mind, Tom was impatient for the night to arrive. When at last it came, people all up and down the valley might have been seen doing the evening chores early in the afternoon. Around five o'clock, wagons and buggies loaded with laughing people could be seen heading for the grove on the Stone place. This was a large grove of elm, cottonwood, box elder, red and white ash, and willow trees, with a few hackberry trees sandwiched in. It covered an area a half mile square and had been cleared to make an excellent picnic ground.

Flushed faced women prepared the food, while the men talked and the children romped merrily. Nearly every woman had baked a cake and there was plenty of choice, with steaming cups of coffee. No one thought of putting the bread into sandwich form, but there was delicious home made bread to be eaten with pickled cucumbers and large chunks of beef.

When everyone had eaten more than comfort allowed, the women cleaned up the food, and then joined the men and children who loafed lazily around under the trees. As soon as the moon arose, someone brought out an old guitar and began to strum while the others gathered around in a circle. "The Old Oaken Bucket" came first; then someone asked for "Onward, Christian Soldiers", which was closely followed by "When You and I Were Young Maggie." Then another hymn, "How Firm a Foundation," was requested.

The young people had gathered into couples. The Plumb girls, Mary, Betsy Jane, and Nelle, along with some of the other more daring girls, permitted their beaux to hold tightly to their hands as they sang.

Mary was in love, very much so, with her young man, while Betsy Jane endured the attentions of her escort because he seemed to want to bestow them.

Presently the older women, or those with small children who did not want to stay for the dancing, began to round up their broods and load them, sleepy eyed and heavy, into the wagons. The moment had come for which the young people had been waiting. The musicians were already on the platform which had been built for their use. All the furniture in the Stones' house had been moved into the yard to make room for the dancers. The room was both long and wide, providing ample space for the flying couples.

Tom sat in the fiddler's chair, with Mac standing near. The people greeted them jovially, genuinely pleased to have them join in the fun. The caller announced the grand march and the musicians made sure once more that their instruments were all in tune. Tom was playing the violin he had made years before. The caller began the chant of the grand march and the dance had begun. The musicians played steadily, one tune following another while the caller called the changes. When at last they

stopped to rest there was much handclapping and stamping of feet, as several people crowded around Tom, eloquent in their praise of his playing ability.

The most popular dance of the evening was the "grapevine twist." Gene Dolph called the dance, his bass voice booming out into the room:

"First couple out to the couple on the right
 And the four hands round-----
 Pick up two and the six hands round----
 Pick up two and the eight hands round----
 Break at the head with the
 grapevine twist, then al-a-man left
 and do-c-do."

On and on the laughing dancers whirled, calling for more when the caller and musicians would have stopped.

Mac stood by, his feet tapping to the tune of the music in spite of his efforts to hold them still. Some one noticed, and tried to pull him into one of the squares. Despite his efforts to refuse, one of the girls succeeded in dragging him onto the floor. Tom watched and grinned, and his fingers flew furiously over the strings. Suddenly Tom signaled to Gene, and presently they swung out to the music of the "Polka-o". Gene let his body away, often times whirling gently to the rhythm as he called,

"First lady balance out to the couple on the right--
 Gent to the left----
 Three hand round, and three by six and a polka-o
 Lady to the right and gent so low
 Three by six and a polka-o
 Lady to the right and gent so low
 Three by six and a polka-o
 Al-a-man left and home you go."

The schottische and the rye waltz followed soon after, and then the musicians stopped to rest. Tom left his chair and started toward the door. The air felt cool and pleasant to his body, and he leaned against the porch railing, breathing deeply. Suddenly he stiffened, and turned his head to listen. Somewhere, nearby, someone was crying, not softly, but in great racking sobs. He moved cautiously toward the edge of the porch and peered over. In the moonlight, he could make out the form of a girl leaning against a tree in the yard, her head buried in her arms, and her shoulders shaking with uncontrolled emotion. Tom's first impulse was to flee, but something prevented his going. He stood irresolute for a moment, and then leaping lightly over the porch rail, he approached the girl. If she heard him coming, she gave no sign. Again he hesitated; then, clearing his throat, he said awkwardly,

"I--I---"

She raised her head and looked at him. "Go 'way!"

Tom was so taken aback he might have done as she ordered had not something about the moonlight shining in her eyes in the brief moment stayed him. When he did not go, she turned to him furiously.

"Oh, please go 'way! I don't want to see anyone---!
Oh, go!"

"What--what's the trouble. I--Can't I do something---?"

The girl was quiet for a moment, and then slowly she raised her head and looked at him.

"Who are you?" She peered at him more closely. "You're-- why, you're Tom Plumb!" Then bitterly, "You wouldn't be interested in helpin' me!"

Tom grew bolder. "Why?"

Once more she turned to look at him. "I want to dance!" she said. "I want to have fun like those other girls," she jerked her head toward the house, "but no one wants to dance with me!"

"Why?" Tom asked again.

She shook her head. "I don't know. I can dance all those calls. I can dance them better than a lot of girls. Maybe it's because my dad killed a man once, and people hold that against me. I don't know why I come to these places. But I want to have some fun so bad sometimes, I have to come. I always hope that sometime, maybe, I--someone will---."

"Who are you?" Tom asked.

"You don't know? No, you wouldn't."

"Who are you?"

"My name is Belle Wicks. Now you can go if you want to."

"Belle Wicks? I don't know any man named Wicks---."

"That was my husband's name. I don't know why I'm tellin' you all this. My dad's name was Joe Phillips."

100
"Phillips---!" Tom started. The remembrance of pain, and of a brown and white dog flashed through his mind.

"He was only my step-father, but most people don't know that."

"What happened to your husband?"

At first she seemed to resent the question, but another look at Tom assured her that genuine interest and not idle curiosity had prompted it.

"He died two years ago."

Mac Pollock called Tom's name from the porch, his frame filling the doorway and shutting off the gleam of light.

"Tom."

Tom and the girl were both startled. "You'd better go back," she urged. "They probably want more music by now. You do saw that fiddle!"

Then Tom said, "Why don't you come with me?"

She stared at him, and then shook her head. "No."

Boldly Tom placed his hand on her arm, urging her toward the house, but she hung back.

"You got to play," she said, "and I don't want to go back in there alone. The Dolphs will be ready to go after while. I can wait."

"The Dolphs! Why, Gene won't be ready to go for hours. You can't stay out here all that time!"

Mac had seen their figures and was coming toward them. The girl pushed Tom toward the house. "Please do go!" she begged.

"Mac", Tom called to Pollock.

Mac looked questioningly from the girl to Tom. Then he said, "Gene wants you, Tom. They're ready to start playin' again."

"Mac, this is Belle Wicks. Take her in and dance."

The girl started to protest, but Mac grinned. "Sure. Can't stop me now that I got started. Miss Wicks," he bowed elaborately, "may I have the honor?"

Suddenly she laughed, and to Tom her laughter had the sound of the sudden tinkling of silver bells. Belle tucked one hand under the arm of each man, and the three started toward the house. Suddenly Belle stopped,

"I can't go in there! I've---" she laughed self-consciously, "I've been crying!"

"Come on!" Tom said impatiently.

At their entrance, there was at first a whispered murmur, but after the music had begun again, and the dancers were once more laughing hilariously and partner jostled against partner, no one seemed to notice. From his place on the musicians' stand, Tom followed Mac and Belle with his eyes. For the first time he began to wish that he could join in the fun on the dance floor. Belle's feet seemed scarcely to touch the floor, as she whirled gracefully, her hand resting lightly on one shoulder and then another.

Tom noticed that she seemed to enjoy one number in particular. It was called to the tune of "Buffalo Gals."

"One little lady goes around the outside, round
the outside, round the outside,
One little lady goes 'round the outside
and swings when she gets home.
Two little ladies go round the outside, round
the outside, round the outside,
Two little ladies go round the outside
and swing when they get home."

The call was continued until every lady in the square had participated, and the dance ended with the usual al-a-man left at the end.

Some one yelled for the "Girl I Left Behind Me," and Tom's feet began to beat in steady rhythm as the orchestra complied with the request. The votes of the caller could scarcely be heard above the roar of dancing feet, but the couples knew the changes so well they did not need to hear.

Gene Dolph bellowed,

"First couple balance out to the couple on
the right
And balance there so nicely
Pass right through between those two
And swing with the girl behind you---
Four hands half and right and left through
On to the next---
And balance there so nicely,
Pass right through between those two
And Swing with the girl behind you."

At last the "Home Sweet Home" waltz was called, and couples began to leave the floor after dancing a measure or two of the music. Tom saw Belle try to start toward the door, and smiled happily to himself when Mac refused to let her go. Lucy Dolph stopped them on her way out, and Tom was puzzled when Mac shook his head.

As soon as the waltz was over, Tom, with his violin

still in his hand, started toward Mac and Belle. She stood with her back to Tom, her little head tossing pertly, her laughter ringing out in answer to Mac's sally.

Mac saw him coming and said something, and she turned to greet him.

"Thank you, Tom Plumb. Mr. Pollock is a wonderful dancer for the beginner he assures me he is." Then the laughter left her face, and she placed her hand lightly on Tom's sleeve.

"I do thank you!" The appeal in her voice sent small shivers of thrill along Tom's spine. "And you, Mr. Pollock," she continued, turning to Mac. "I must go now," she went on hurriedly, glancing toward the door where Lucy was waiting.

She started away, and Tom said desperately, "Belle, wait---."

She half-way turned back, smiled, and hurried on.

Tom stared after her, and then Mac Pollock pushed him lightly on the shoulder, "Go on, ask her when you can see her!"

Tom glanced guiltily at Mac, then strode after Belle.

He caught her arm. "Belle, the next time there's a dance, I mean---, I'd like---would you---?"

"Would I go with you, Tom Plumb? You just ask me and see!"

Once more she started away from him, and Tom stood in

the middle of the room and watched her. When she reached Lucy at the door, she turned and flashed toward him a smile which made his heart leap.

"Say, Tom," Gene Dolph was coming toward him. "How about joining up with us regular? We can use a fiddler like you!"

"Why, thanks, Dolph. Don't know if I could make it every time, but I'd like to do it again some time."

Later, as they were riding back to Mac's place, Mac said to Tom.

"You like little Mrs. Wicks, don't you, Tom boy?"

The question startled Tom out of his reverie. "Why-- yes, didn't you?"

"I enjoyed the evening very much." Tom noticed that Mac spoke carefully.

"What happened to her husband?" Tom said, after they had ridden awhile in silence.

"Who---? Oh, you mean Mrs. Wicks?" Tom was certain that Mac knew whom he meant. "He died of some sort of heart trouble, about two years ago, I guess. Never knew him. Didn't amount to much; spent most of his time loafin' at Jake's in Indianola."

"Was he mean to her?"

"I've heard so. She has a child."

"A child---! Oh."

"A boy. About four by now, I think."

"Where does she live now. What's she do?"

"Lucy Dolph gives her enough work in her store, I guess. Old Luce ain't as spry as she used to be. Kinda likes to have some one around, I s'pose. Lucy and some of the others are older'n I can remember sometimes. Seems like they're just like they always was. Gettin' purty old myself, if it comes to that."

"And I'm not gettin' any younger," Tom said. "Don't seem like we ought to be gettin' along that far, does it, Mac?"

"Sure don't."

"Whyn't you ever marry, Mac?" It was the first time either of the friends had ever asked the other a question regarding their personal lives.

Mac laughed shortly. "Never found any one'd have me, I guess. Leastways, no one I'd have, too."

"It was on account of Aunt Jane, wasn't it, Mac?" Tom asked the question quietly.

At first he thought that Mac was going to ignore it, but presently he said,

"Yes, it was, Tom. Been a long time now since I lost Jane to Jack, but they's still times I can't look at her without my heart leapin' into my throat. Nope, no one else could ever take Jane's place with me, boy, and she didn't want me. I don't like to talk about it."

"Musta been hard, those tough years, seein' her doin'

without the things you could have given her. You helped Jack a lot, didn't ya'? Aunt Jane told Ma once that they'd have starved if it hadn't been for you."

"Jack wasn't much of a provider there for awhile." It was the first and only time Tom was ever to hear a word of criticism of Mac's lifelong friend cross his lips.

Presently Mac volunteered, "Joe Phillips killed a man up the Platte, years ago."

"She told me. Said he was her step-dad."

"Step-dad, huh? Thought he was her real father. Most everybody does."

"That's what she said. She was cryin' when I found her, 'cause no one wanted to dance with her."

But though Tom played for all the dances that followed, Belle never came. At last, unable to resist the temptation to see her, he rode to Indianola to learn the disappointing news that she had gone to Lincoln some time before. Tom was at a loss to explain the feeling that swept over him when he heard that she was gone. He had never felt this way before--he could not understand it now. For Tom the summer dragged on. His sister Mary was planning to be married soon. Her husband-to-be had secured work in Lincoln and she was going there to marry him. She wanted Betsy Jane to go with her, but Ellen was reluctant to spare her from the summer work.

Betsy Jane came to Tom, angry because of her mother's

refusal. Tom said suddenly,

"I'll take you girls down, Betsy!"

"How?" His sister was startled.

"I'll drive old Mag and Fan on the buckboard rig. With steady drivin' we could make it for the Fourth's celebration. Been thinkin' about goin' down for the Fourth, anyway." He did not add that Belle's presence there had put the idea in his head in the first place.

So, despite Ellen's tearful anger, the three started on the trip. Mary and Betsy were to stay with another girl from Indianola, who had gone to Lincoln to live some years before. Tom wondered how he could find Belle. He had no idea where she might be, nor what she was doing. Nor did he know of anyone he might ask about her.

When he finally found her it was not as he had planned or hoped that it would be. He had gone with his sister and several others to the fair grounds, and tiring of the usual activity, he wandered away by himself. He was not prepared for the sight of her familiar figure when she suddenly appeared ahead of him, laughing up into the face of her companion. The man with her looked to be a good deal older than she. His body was soft and pouchy, his arms flabby below his sleeves, which were rolled to his elbows. The first thing which struck Tom was his abundant growth of fiery red hair, and his curling red whiskers. His familiarity with Belle annoyed Tom, but it did not occur

to him to condemn Belle for her acquiescence to it. When she saw him she stopped short in startled recognition. It might have been something in the way Tom looked at her which caused her face to become covered with a deep flush.

Then she came toward him, extending her hand, "Why Tom Plumb! What are you doing here?"

"Looking for you," he said quietly.

"What!" Her eyes widened at his abrupt statement. She smiled. "Oh, Tom, this is Mr. Anderson. Sol, Tom's from back home. It's nice to see him."

The man shook Tom's hand jovially. "Glad to know ya', Plumb. Glad to know ya'. Down for the celebration, eh? Havin' a good time?"

"Not particularly, no."

"Well, that's too bad! Maybe we better see what we can do about that, eh, Belle, girl?"

Tom did not like Anderson's insinuations, or his attitude, but he went with them because it was the only way he knew by which he could be near Belle. He hoped he could persuade her to leave the other man, and go with him, but apparently Anderson had no intention of permitting that.

Tom noticed with pride and relief that Belle refused the whiskey and other drinks which Sol kept urging onto her. Tom accepted because he did not want to offend Anderson. Several times he caught Belle's eyes upon him, but when he tried to talk to her alone, she evaded him.

Toward evening some more friends of Anderson's joined them, and at last Tom had an opportunity to talk with Belle alone.

"Let's get out of here," he said. "I want to talk to you."

She looked around for Sol, and finding him talking loudly to the others, she immediately arose and followed Tom to the door. He took her arm and guided her through the crowd, until they came to a bench which had been set up under a tree on the outskirts of the grounds. She sank down upon it with a soft sigh.

"Why did you come down here, Belle? Why didn't you ever come back to the dances? I looked for you."

"My little boy took sick, Tom, and he needed a good doctor. I---", her voice broke, and she passed her hand over her forehead in a vague gesture. "After he died, I couldn't go back! I couldn't have stood it back there. I stayed here and tried to forget everything!"

"Your little boy died?" Tom's voice was horrified in his shock and sympathy for her.

"I buried him here," she volunteered. "My mother's buried here, and I didn't have any desire to bury him by his father."

"Oh." Tom did not ask any more questions, but he reached for her hand and held it tightly.

Presently she turned to face him, and her voice was

low and hoarse with pent up emotion.

"You are always so kind and gentle with me, Tom Plumb. Why do you do it?"

"I love you, Belle." He said simply.

She caught her breath in a sharp intake. "You mustn't, Tom!" she protested.

"Why?"

"Oh, because I----. I don't want to hurt you, and you might be hurt!"

"You mean you couldn't love me?"

"Oh, I don't know. I never thought about it. I might, but it wouldn't do any good."

"Belle, I don't know what you mean or why you said that, but if I asked you, would you marry me? Now, tomorrow, whenever you want to?"

"Do you know what you're saying, Tom? Do you realize what it would mean for you to take me back there as your wife?"

"I don't care about anything except that I love you, and I want to marry you if you'll have me."

They were married the next day, and Tom took Belle back to the Beaver valley in the buckboard with the surprised and resentful Betsy. Before they reached home, however, the unpredictable Betsy was won completely over onto the side of her brother's wife.

Tom took Belle to Mac Pollock's house. After his first

surprised ejaculation, the latter was noncommittal on the subject of Tom's marriage. The problem of a place for his bride to live presented itself to Tom for the first time. Mac finally solved the problem for the summer, at least. To the back of Mac's house there stood an old barn which he had used for several years but which he now had no need for. He offered to let Tom and Belle fix up the barn as best they could and use it until Tom was able to secure a better place.

And so it happened that Tom and Belle's first venture in housekeeping was in a barn, a barn that had at one time been used as a shelter for hogs and cattle.

CHAPTER VIII

Some women could have accepted the circumstances and made the best of it, but Belle was not one of these. Not that she complained. On the contrary, she accepted the situation without comment, but she did not possess the knack of homemaking, even under the best of conditions, and the barn into which they had moved was certainly not conducive to pleasant arrangements. Another woman, perhaps, might have met the challenge and come out the winner, but to Belle the bewilderment of trying to make a home out of a cattle shed never ceased. Tom soon learned that his wife was not a housekeeper; she seemed unable to bring disorder into order. Her futile attempts ended in even worse confusion than when she had started.

Tom made most of their furniture, partly because he could not afford to buy it, but mostly because he was happiest when he was whittling, hammering or sawing.

If housekeeping were an unsurmountable problem to Belle, cooking presented an even greater one. She did not like to cook, and had never learned how to put food together into attractive dishes. For the most part, her meals consisted of the basic foods of potatoes, meat and corn bread, without variety. She made no effort to discover Tom's favorite dishes or to prepare new ones.

The discovery of the fact that she was pregnant served only to increase the muddle of things. She was listless and ill, oftentimes lying in bed the biggest share of the day.

Later on, when the first discomfort of pregnancy had passed, she became restless, and wandered about, sometimes trying to rearrange the scanty furniture, but more often going off by herself to walk along the creek, returning just barely in time to have some semblance of a meal prepared, for Tom.

Sometimes Tom watched her with wondering pain in his eyes, but for the most part he seemed content. The barn was a place to sleep, the food she served him good enough to allay his hunger.

During that winter, Mac and Tom fed a large number of hogs. His work took Tom away from Belle early in the morning and sometimes he would not return until late at night. Often he found her in bed, and his supper of fried potatoes and meat covered with cold grease. In the morning, if he attempted to talk to her, she would often cry and upbraid him for his neglect, and he would go away without mentioning the distastefulness of the cold food, or the disorder of the place.

Mac sensed that Tom was not happy, and kept him busy as much of the time as he could. They made several trips a week to various places to buy feed, for Mac had not raised enough to do them. It was necessary to build a number

of substantial, warm hog houses for the animals during the winter, and this work Tom loved to do. He seemed happiest when he was busy constructing something.

Tom and Belle's first child was a boy, and for some unknown reason, Belle wanted to call him Thomas Patsie. Tom was proud that she chose his name to call her first born, but he was somewhat nonplussed about the second name.

He made no objection, however, for he was glad that the child had arrived safely, and that Belle now seemed more like her old self. But again he was not prepared for the situation which soon became evident, for all of Belle's adoration, all her concern was now for her baby, and at times it seemed to Tom that she actually resented his presence, or his attentions to his own child.

Tom was amused and pleased when Mac showed such great delight about the baby. The big man would come to the barn in the early evening and fondle Pat until it was the baby's bedtime. Sometimes he picked the child up in his arms and executed a series of dance steps while holding Pat high above his head, and humming the accompanying tune. The baby soon learned to love this, and his tiny arms out stretched toward Mac as soon as he saw him.

The baby seemed to take Mac's mind off something which was troubling him. Tom had noticed the worried lines about Mac's mouth, and several times he had tried to draw

out his friend in an effort to learn what it might be. But Mac always managed to turn the conversation, and evade Tom's questions. When Tom attempted to tell Belle of his concern for Mac, she shrugged her shoulders and dismissed it, saying that Mac could handle his affairs without Tom's help. She had never been able to appreciate Tom's feeling toward Mac, and Tom knew that she did not realize how deep-rooted their friendship had grown.

One evening, as they were finishing up the evening chores, Tom said abruptly,

"Mac, got something on your mind?"

"Something on.....? What d'ya mean?"

"Something's botherin' ya', Mac. I know you well enough to be able to tell that. Gonna tell me sometime?"

"Why, I--I didn't realize it was botherin' me that much. I mean, that it was so evident. Ain't nothing important to you, Tom. It's just that I love this old U.S.A. too much, I guess."

"What-----!" Tom's jaw fell in utter astonishment, and he dropped the bucket of feed he carried, with a sudden bang.

Mac laughed. "You don't worry about what goin' on out in the state, do you, Tom? Maybe you're smart not to, but I can't help it. The farmers ain't gettin' a square deal, and I resent it. Seems like we get a kick in the seat of the pants every time we turn around. Our posterior ain't

gonna stand much more of it! I been followin' this Populist movement that's been goin' on these last few years. They got some good ideas, if they had a chance to work 'em out!"

"Populist---? Oh."

"They been doin' things down in Kansas. Got a good start in Nebraska, too. Guess you know the fusion forces won out the last time in Kansas and Nebraska. 'Bout the only place they made a showin', I guess."

"Fusion?" Tom was ashamed of his dullness, but the words meant nothing to him.

Again Mac laughed, and chucked him gently on the chin,

"Don't get all het up about it, Tom. Ain't no problem for you to fret about. Me, either, I suppose, only I read stuff, and get to thinkin'. I wanted to go down to Lincoln last February when they had some sort of a convention down there, but you know how it was about gettin' away."

"Hell, if I'd known you wanted to go...!"

"Butler got the meetin' in Lincoln, when they was gonna go clear to Chicago."

"Butler?"

"He's the Chairman. He figured Lincoln bein' Bryan's home, and Nebraska bein' the strongest fusion state in the union....."

"Oh, hell," Tom suddenly sputtered. "Don't try to talk to me. It's just so many words. But damn it all,

the next time you want ta' do something-----."

"Sure, Tom, I know I could leave you to manage things. But I don't know what I could do, if I'd go. I don't know enough."

Tom pondered Mac's words for several days afterwards. He suddenly realized the scope of his friends' interests, and his own utter inability to share some of those interests.

But soon Tom's mind was jarred away from Mac's ideas, for his younger sister was to be married that spring, and Betsy Jane, who had married two years before, was expecting a child. She came to Belle and Tom, the flush of anticipation and thrill on her cheeks, and to Tom's surprise, Belle showed the interest and enthusiasm which Betsy seemed to want. Betsy and her husband had moved across into Kansas about three miles, and when Bet begged Tom to let Belle and little Pat go home with her for a few days, he readily consented.

In Belle's absence, Mac came down from his place to stay with Tom. It was like old times, Tom reflected, watching Mac cook their evening meal while he carried in enough wood to fill the wood box, and got an extra bucket of water from the well so that they would be sure to have enough on hand.

After they had eaten, and Mac had finished the dishes, they sat silently enjoying the evening air, each contentedly sucking on a pipe. They were startled out of their reverie

by the noise of a sudden "plop" close to Mac, and he jumped aside, while Tom made a dash for the broom, and Mac followed with the stove poker in hand. A large bull snake lay on the floor, regarding them almost as startledly as they were him. Then sensing their intention, he slithered toward the door.

"Let 'im go," Mac laughed. "Won't hurt nothin'. Just scared hell outa me. Musta climbed up onto the rafters to get away from the heat this afternoon. I'd a thought it'd have been plenty hot up there, though; by the way, Tom, what you gonna do about a house this winter?"

Tom shook his head. "Don't know. Seems like I can't manage one. Belle don't seem to care."

"Better not tell her about that snake, or she won't stay here any longer," Mac grinned.

When they had settled themselves again, Tom began to ask Mac more questions about their former conversation.

"Been doin' any more thinkin'?"

"Haven't had much time to. It's just at night, when I'm in bed, I get to maulin' over things in my mind."

"Is there anything we could do, 'way out here?" Tom asked.

"Don't seem like it. McKinley's gonna win the election, anyway."

"McKinley a good man?"

"Well, he ain't done so bad this last time. He's

promising a return of prosperity, and no free silver. O' course, there's the war with Spain."

"The war with Spain don't mean much to me. Never paid a great deal of attention. Didn't seem to make much imprint out here."

They talked long into the night, lighting one pipeful of tobacco after another. Tom was amazed when he discovered the time. It had passed so rapidly, and what seemed so strange to Tom was that never before had these thoughts occurred to him.

The next morning Tom and Mac were just finishing up the morning work when Mac saw a buckboard coming at a furious pace into the yard. He recognized Betsy's young husband, Jeff, and Belle, holding a wailing Pat.

He strode to meet them.

"Oh, Mac!" The anguish in Belle's voice struck Mac full force. "It's Pat! He took sick last night. He kept gettin' worse, and we didn't know what to do. We've got to get a doctor. Please come, quick!"

Tom had reached them by that time. He took one look at Belle, and Pat. At his first question, Belle began to cry.

"Oh, don't stand there! Do something," she snapped at him. Mac saw Tom check the hand he had reached toward her.

Something died, then, in Tom's eyes. Mac saw it, and turned away. Belle did not see. As Tom leaped into the buckboard, she turned hysterically to Jeff, urging him

to hurry.

Mac stood in the middle of the road, and watched them out of sight. Then he shook his head and turned back to the barn. As he entered the door, his eyes took in the details of the place. He had cleaned it, somewhat, in the time he had been there. He had even emptied the garbage pail which had run over, and messed the floor around it.

There was nothing to inspire a feeling of a home. Mac wondered vaguely whether if Belle had a real house she would do any better, and dismissed the thought with a negative answer. His almost half-decided purpose of offering to lend Tom the money to build a house for the winter died within him.

Suddenly he thought of Pat! A cold chill swept over him. What had been wrong with the child? He thought of Tom, and what it would mean for him if Pat should die! Death! Mac felt physically ill as the full force of the word struck him. For the first time the realization of what Pat had come to signify in his life came over him. He went about the rest of the morning's work mechanically. It was almost noon when he saw the buckboard returning. He could tell from a distance that Pat was all right.

"His stomach was upset," Tom said shortly, his stormy eyes flickering toward Belle. "She gave him hot salt-water last night. Gripped his poor little belly."

Mac took the sleeping baby in his arms, while Tom

helped Jeff water the horses before he continued on home.

Belle flung herself on the bed, and after a glance at her, Mac said, "You rest, Belle. I'll get a bite to eat."

"I don't want anything to eat!"

"Tom probably will. I'll fix a bite."

He wondered what she would have expected of Tom if Mac had not been there. When the two men had finished eating, Mac rose to leave. He wanted to get away from the strained atmosphere and the sullen silence of the barn.

Tom followed him to the hog sheds, and said, "Thanks, Mac."

"Sure," Mac grunted. Then, "Got to sell these hogs soon, Tom. Cost too much to feed. Ought to bring a good price in another month."

"Where you goin' to ship?"

"Chicago, I guess. Best market. We'll need some help to load."

The spring wore on, with all its work, and all its beauty. Tom had never lost his love for the beauty in nature. Now, as he walked along the creek bank, or down the country roads, his mind often wandered back to those happy days when Nebraska had been an exciting adventure to him. When he had ridden Dan, and followed closely by Scott, had wandered off by himself for days at a time. Good old Scott! He had lived to be eleven years old before Tom had finally

had to shoot him to end his misery. Even when he was not able to trot at Tom's heels, his loyal, adoring eyes had followed Tom out of sight. Dan had missed the dog, too. Tom could tell it by the way the little pony had nudged the old dog as he lay on his pallet by the doorstep.

Then Tom lost Dan, and with him, the last vestige of his youth. The pony had been struck by lightning during a bad electric storm, and Tom had found him the next morning, his body rigid and cold, and evidencing the horrible death struggle of the pony. This time there were no Pawnee boys to offer a balm for the wound, and Tom's loss and grief had seemed almost unbearable.

But life, Tom thought, had moved along at so furious a pace in those days that time had almost erased the hurt. Now, when he longed for someone, or something, to give him complete love and trust, the memories all flooded back.

Even Tom's pleasure in his little son was lost in Belle's annoyed disapproval. The child had made such a breach between them that when Tom learned there was to be another, his dismay was too much for him to conceal. Belle saw it, and angry glints lighted her eyes.

"You needn't think I want it, either, Tom Plumb," she raged.

"Want it? Oh, Belle, don't say that. Of course we want it. A Girl! You'd like that, wouldn't you? Anyway Pat needs another baby around."

"You never think of me," she accused. "Never one word about how I feel. I can't eat, and you've never even noticed. I just wish you had to go through some of this, and you wouldn't want another baby!"

"Belle." Tom tried to caress her hand, but she snatched it away, and turned her back toward him. What could he say? Where had he failed her?

"Belle, I'll try to help. You tell me what you want done, and I'll do it."

She sniffed and said nothing, and seeing his utter failure to reach her, Tom left her alone. In his haste, he forgot his hat, and when he returned for it a while later, he found Belle on the bed, convulsed in sobs. He stood irresolute in the doorway, wanting to comfort her, but his heart drew away from any more of the inflictions of pain she always managed to give. Suddenly he strode toward her and caught her shoulders in his strong hands, forcing her to turn to face him. She had not heard him, and his presence shocked her into silence. For a long moment they stared at one another, and then she relaxed against him, burying her face in his shoulder.

"Belle," he whispered, gathering her close. "What is it, honey? What's happened to us? Let's start all over again, please!"

"I feel so awful," she mumbled, her voice caught on a hiccup.

"I know, honey. I wish you didn't."

Again her body shook in a hiccough, and she clamped her hands over her mouth, struggling to get to her feet. Tom picked her up and reached the doorway in two strides, helping her while the agony of the nausea held her. Then he carried her back to the bed, and brought her a cool drink of water.

"I don't want it," she moaned. "It only makes me worse!"

"Just a little sip," he urged. "It'll cool your mouth off."

Mac had gone to Chicago with the load of hogs, and Tom had all the work to do. With reluctance he left her, but before he went, he leaned over her and brushed his lips close to her ear. She rewarded him with a hesitant, little smile, but it was enough to make his heart sing, and his morning's work seem lighter.

Belle grew steadily thinner and more wan as the child grew within her body. Ellen came to see her, and went away with worried eyes. Tom took her to the doctor several times, but she seemed no better. As the time drew closer, Ellen urged her to come to the big, frame house where she would receive better care.

A week after she went home with Ellen, the baby was born. There were times during the ordeal when it seemed Belle would not pull through. Tom stared at his mother as she worked quietly, her still slender hands seeming to know just what to do most to help the suffering woman.

The doctor shook his head, and looked grave.

At last the child was born, but Belle lay white and still, her eyes closed. Tom stood beside her, his big hand completely enveloping one of hers. Suddenly he dropped to his knees, a dry sob catching in his throat.

"Belle! Belle! don't die! Don't leave me alone with two little babies! Oh, Belle, I need you so!"

She stirred, and her eyes opened slowly. Her lips moved, and he pressed his ear closer to catch her mumbled words,

"What--what is it, Tom?"

"Oh, God!" The relief in his voice was as the sudden release of an arrow. "It's another boy, honey! A great little feller!"

CHAPTER IX

The years wore on. Tom and Belle still lived in the barn, and both seemed satisfied to keep on doing so. Tom did put in a new floor to take the place of the crude one he and Mac had put in to serve for that first winter.

During the years from 1902 to 1909, three more children, a boy and two girls, came to Tom and Belle. And even as life came, so came death. Hi, who had suffered through the years from the pain caused by the ball in his leg, became steadily more lame, and the pain grew unbearable. He would never submit to an operation to have it removed, however, and there was nothing else which could be done to relieve him.

One evening toward sundown, Tom strode into his father's house to find his mother sitting with bowed head beside his father's bed. Hi lay still and peaceful on the bed, his big hands folded in repose across his chest.

"Ma!"

Ellen raised her head and looked at him for a long moment. He went across the room to her, and checked himself suddenly when she reached out her hand and smiled at him.

"I'm glad you came, Tommy," she said, quietly. "Your Pa went just a little while ago. He was easy at the last."

Seems like the good Lord almost always makes it that way, don't it? Pa suffered so much up till then. When his time came, he turned his head to me, and said, soft like, 'The pain's all gone, Ellin'. And I was glad, Tommy, so glad! We've had a good life together, and a happy one. I'm just ready to go, now."

"Oh, Ma!" Tom, as always in his moments of greatest stress, was at loss for the words he wanted. He felt them so vividly inside his breast; if he could only tell her!

"Pa was a good man, Ma. He always did the best he knew how. Better come home with me now, Ma. I'll take care of things."

She shook her head. "No, Tommy, I want to stay with him. He wanted the words said here at home, without no fuss. I'd like to be alone tonight."

Tom did up the few evening chores, and then took reluctant leave of his mother. He dreaded telling the news to Belle and the children, and most of all to little Pat, who had come to love his grandfather with the great devotion of the very young for the very old. After he had broken the news to Belle, he called Pat to him.

"Like to come for a walk with Dad, Pat?"

With the wisdom of a nine year old, Pat looked at his father, and without a word, turned toward the road with him.

The quietness of the evening seemed intense. Tom and his son walked slowly, while Tom's eyes drank in the

magnitude of the prairie and the sky which came down to meet it in the distance.

"Pat," he said, placing his hand on the boy's shoulder.

"See that big cloud up there?"

"The big, fleecy white one, Dad, that looks like a sheep?"

"Yes, son. Maybe it is a big sheep; maybe it's lots of sheep all in one big sheep, with a shepherd to look after 'em. D'ya suppose?"

"Gee, Dad, maybe."

"There is a shepherd up there, Pat. He's called God, like you study at Sunday School." Tom stumbled on. He was on unfamiliar ground, now, for he'd never bothered much about God and Sunday Schools.

"I know," the boy said, eagerly. "He watches us all the time, even when we're asleep!"

"Oh! Does he----? Sure, he does, Pat. Even when we go to sleep and people can't wake us up down here, that shepherd up there can wake us, and we can see him for the first time."

"You mean, when we die?"

The abrupt question coming from the young boy startled Tom. He'd had no idea death was so real for the boy. He guessed he didn't understand much about kids, anyway, even with five of them.

"Did somebody I know die, Dad?" The boy was making it

easier for him. He felt suddenly inadequate to be Pat's. The words he had spoken seemed unnecessary and foolish in the face of the boy's blunt questions.

"Yes, Pat. Your Grandpa went to sleep and he's up there with God, now, son."

"Oh, no, Dad. Not Grandpa, not my Gran'!" Pat stared up at his father, the color draining from his face, leaving his big blue eyes stark pools of misery.

"Please don't take it so hard, son. He's still watchin' out for you, even from up there."

"Pa, I'd--I'd like to--to go down to the creek, to see that old sow and pigs. I mean, just go on alone---."

"Sure, son." Tom stopped, and watched Pat's sturdy little shoulders as he held his head high, and marched on.

He could understand the boy's desire to be alone, for it had always been his own way. When Pat came back later, the tear stains upon his grubby little cheeks were still evident, but his eyes were steady, his voice the same.

They had the funeral in the living room of the big house; the house where there had been births and weddings, but until now, never a death.

Tom could only admire his mother's calm, self-control. Not once did she break down, nor had she, unless it were while she watched over Hi the night she had stayed alone with his dead body.

That summer a strange new thrill came into the Beaver valley area. Ren Wilson's grandson bought a Model-T Ford to the surprised delight of some, and the horror of others. On Sunday afternoons, he took those persons who would go for a ride. It became the favorite summer pastime for some of the younger people. The gasoline buggy was not a new thing, entirely, in the valley, for the people had seen them in McCook and Indianola. But this was one which practically belonged to all the valley people, since it was right in the vicinity.

Tom snorted when he saw it, and never lost his disdain for the new type of carriage. The old buckboard, or a high top buggy was good enough for him!

During the winter after Hi's death, Belle gave birth to twin girls. Tom never recovered from the miracle of the double birth! His babies! His and Belle's, and twins! They were healthy little things, and the delight of all the neighbors.

Later, when spring came again, and Belle and the babies were able to be out, the Wilson boy came to take them for a ride in his Model-T. Tom objected strenuously, but Belle wanted to go, so leaving the baby girls behind, because Tom had one under each arm and refused to let go of them, Belle took her first automobile ride. The thrill left a stain of rose on her fading cheeks, and brought back a sparkle to her eyes that Tom had not seen for years.

Ellen's wish to follow Hi to the great beyond was soon granted. She, too, passed on peacefully, leaving no memories of agony behind her, leaving only the acute sense of loss of her kind gentle ways, her serene, sweet smile.

In the autumn of 1910, Mac had conceived the idea of having a shipping point at the place where his loading pens were located. The idea had come from the inconvenience of driving or hauling so much stock so many miles. It did not take much effort to persuade the railroad to lay a spur, and immediately afterwards the stock-yards were built. Then the idea of a town began to materialize, and later that same season, a man named Smith came from Denver to lay out the town site. The settlers met and chose the name of Marion for their little village, much to Mac's consternation, and veiled delight, for he had supposed most of them had forgotten his first name was Marion. Mac soon after began the construction of a new house. It was the first stone house to be built close around in the valley, and it presented a magnificent appearance to the people.

Tom bought the barn and lots upon which he had been living, and Mac's new house seemed to arouse his interest in a new dwelling place of his own. When he had built a small frame house, which was only about twenty feet west of the old barn, he then built a blacksmith shop, and was the first to manage a business of that kind in the new village. The little town grew rapidly, a hotel being

put up, and several stores, along with the postoffice.

In a neat little schoolhouse 38x40, Em and Lont's first child, Vanche, started her first term of school teaching, with her mother as a helpful guide and source of encouragement. The story Em liked best to repeat to her daughter was that she should be happy that there were no boys like Tom Plumb to put up with.

Mac was building a large, commodious elevator, located on the St. Francis branch of the railroad, and in the summer the largest shipment of hogs that had ever been entered on the records was made to Denver by Mac and Tom. Both men had to go with the carloads of six thousand hogs. The animals brought more than two dollars over the regular market price, and for a time it seemed that Mac and Tom had made their fortune at last.

But sickness in his family soon took away most of Tom's money. The little twins came down with the measles, and efforts to save them were futile. Belle was out of her head with grief, and because he felt so terrible, Tom was not able to comfort. He missed his mother as he had never missed her in life. She would have known what to say to help Belle.

Even Mac was not there to help, for he had gone to Lincoln soon after he and Tom returned to Marion. Mac had not lost his interest in the affairs of the state.

The beautiful new stone house was left to stand empty; the little town that had been Mac's lifelong dream and

ambition, was almost forgotten in Mac's broadened concerns. He became known in Lincoln as the "man behind the scene." His sound advice and fairmindedness made him well known in political circles. Strangely enough, it was to the Republican forces that he offered his allegiance. His Populist days were over.

He was careful that his picture, or any publicity concerning him, should never appear in the paper. The folks back home were disappointed in this, for to them the "noise" was the symbol of the politician's success.

Tom now, in this new distress, was not even sure of Mac's address. Having never been one to write letters, Tom hadn't bothered to ask. Several people thought they knew, but no one was sure, and by the time Tom's letter had reached Mac in Lincoln, the little girls had been gone almost a week.

Mac came as soon as he received the news, arriving at Mafion one day about noon, on the train he had been responsible for.

Tom did not know he was coming, and the sight of his familiar figure entering the door of the blacksmith shop was almost too much for Tom's self-control. Mac grasped his hand in a tight grip.

"How are you, Tom? How's Belle?"

"I'm all right, I guess, Mac. Belle ain't very good. Can't seem to forget that if we'd had a good doctor in

time the little girls might have lived. Old 'Doc' Moore was gone and we got Simons from McCook. He didn't get here till the next noon, after we called him."

"The son-of-a-b-----!"

"Go on over to the house and talk to Belle, Mac. It'll do her good to see you. I'll close up and be over pretty soon."

Mac was not prepared for Belle's reaction when she answered his knock. Her thinness and the pallidness of her face made him wince. The thought flashed through his mind that she had never been well, or completely happy in life. She began to cry, as he had known she would, and her words of greeting were incoherent. As he had done so many times before, Mac took charge. He put her in a chair and insisted that she stay there. Then, with what seemed to Belle to be his magic power, he finished the preparations for dinner which she had half-heartedly begun. When the children came in and found Mac there, the joy in their faces put a peculiar ache into Mac's heart, and Tom's great relief at having him seemed to Mac almost more than he deserved, for Mac Pollock had never realized the depth of Tom's gratefulness.

When the children had finished their meal, and had gone back out doors, Mac began to talk to Tom and Belle.

"Pretty busy these kind of days, Tom?"

"Nope, not very. Ain't much doin' in the shop, and I

never was much of a farmer, you know. The boys do most of that. Damned if I don't think they like it! They make me think of Pa."

"How'd you and Belle and the kids like to come back to Lincoln with me for awhile?"

"Oh, Mac'." Belle's voice held the first spark of interest Tom had heard in weeks.

"God, Mac, I don't know. Belle and the girls could go. The boys and I hadn't ought to, I'm afraid. And--," he glanced toward his wife, "there's another thing, too. Belle ain't feelin' so well."

"You mean----?" Mac looked from one to the other.

Belle nodded, "Yes, it's another baby, Mac. But not for a long time yet. I'd like to go for a few days, if Tom and the boys could get along."

"Sure, if you'd like to go, we can make out all right."

So when Mac returned to Lincoln three days later, Belle, with Ruthie and Flossie, accompanied him. The trip was full of thrills for the girls, and Mac noticed that Belle seemed as excited as they.

He arranged for rooms for them, and spent what time he could in an effort to show them a good time. He had a number of friends who were glad to entertain any of his acquaintances, and one of the women arranged a party on the last night of their visit.

The memory of that party Belle cherished for years after. When she had returned to Tom and to Marion, she could erase part of her restlessness and dissatisfaction by dreams of that party.

Tom and Belle's last child was a boy, and they named him for Tom's father. Little Hi soon grew into his parents' hearts for he was a beautiful baby, with blond curls, and deep brown eyes. The fact that neither Tom nor Belle had wanted another child was soon lost in their deep pleasure in the little fellow.

But tragedy had not yet ended for Belle and Tom. It seemed that their endurance was being tested, for death claimed two more of their children within a year of one another. Flossie had caught a bad cold during the winter, and had not been able to get rid of the cough which accompanied it. Late into the spring she was very ill, but as summer approached she seemed to be much better. She spent much time in the warm sun, and Belle spared her from the work as much as possible, so that when school started she would be able to attend.

All went well until the cold weather set in, and then she caught another cold. Before either Belle or Tom could realize what was happening, she was desperately ill, and the week before Christmas she died.

It was a dreary holiday time for almost all of the Marion people, for the little girl had won a place in

every heart. People came bringing food, and stayed to help Belle with the house work, or Tom with the chores. Little Ruthie could not be consoled, for she and her sister had been so close to one another.

Jane Langley, now called "Aunt Jane" by every child within a radius of fifty miles, took Ruthie home with her to give the child a chance to be away from reminders of her sister, and to give Belle a rest. Little Hi was Belle's greatest consolation, for his sympathetic little hands caressed her tired face, and he seemed to share her grief.

"Mama tired?" he would ask, when she sank into a chair and he came to crawl into her lap.

"Yes, little boy, Mama is so tired," she would say, catching him close to her.

"Hi sorwy, Mama."

"Oh, you blessed baby. Mama knows you are. You're Mama's good little man, aren't you, sweet?"

"Good wittle mans," Hi would repeat, snuggling close to her.

Jane kept Ruthie almost two weeks, and when she brought her home, the child seemed to be completely reconciled to her loss. She was the same cheerful little girl that she had been before, but people noticed that she had grown much quieter, and that when she attended

the Sunday School parties she did not enter into the fun as she had done with Flossie to follow her.

The following winter was a terrible, cold one, and many days the children were not able to walk the half mile to attend school. On these days Ruthie was especially restless, and would often become so irritable that Belle was at a loss to understand it, and mother and daughter would quarrel. These quarrels left Belle sick at heart, and made Ruthie rebellious and hateful.

One morning when Tom awoke, he found a fierce snow storm raging, and after conferring with Belle they decided not to call the children, since they would not be able to go to school anyway. But Ruthie was awake and insisted upon going, and after refusing to be persuaded not to, she started out.

"Maybe you ought to take her, Tom," Belle worried. "I can't even see the pump from the window, the snow's so thick."

Tom put on his jacket and overshoes, and started after the girl, who had just passed the barn when he caught up with her.

She turned swiftly when she heard him, but when he silently held out his hand to guide her across the road, she smiled at him, and saying nothing, thrust her small hand into his big one and they trudged on together.

When they reached the school house, no one was there, so Tom opened a window and crawled in to open the door for her. Then he built a fire and soon the little building was warm and comfortable. Still no one came, and after an hour's wait, Tom suggested they go home. Reluctantly she began to put on her wraps and they started the trek home. The wind had come up in even fiercer gales, and as they were facing it this time, their breaths caught sharply as they came out of the school house door.

"Can't see a thing!" Ruthie panted, catching on to Tom's hand tightly.

Somewhere along the way, Tom lost his sense of direction, and with a sudden lurch of fear, his heart turned cold when he realized that he had taken the little girl in a complete circle, and that they were no nearer home than they had been when they were at the school house. He said nothing to Ruthie, for he did not want to frighten her, but he looked desperately around for some familiar sign. At last he saw a fence and began to follow it, hoping that it would eventually lead to a house. Ruthie had begun to cry from the cold, her hands felt like ice through her mitten, and Tom was forced on through the blinding snow by his horror of her suffering.

When at last they came to a house, and stumbled onto the porch, Tom was carrying the child, his own heart beating furiously, and his lungs about to burst.

It was Mac's stone house which they had reached, and when Mr. and Mrs. Hill, who were renting the place, heard them and came to investigate, Tom had just enough strength to thrust the little girl into Hill's arms, before he sank in exhaustion to his knees. Hill carried Ruthie into the house, and came back to help Tom.

The girl was badly frozen, and the pains which the heat soon caused were almost more than she could bear. Mrs. Hill rubbed her all over in cold water, and made her sit with her feet in a pan of snow while Mr. Hill rubbed her legs and ankles. Tom was not conscious of his own pain, for Ruthie's cries shut out all else. When at last she became quiet, Tom turned to the Hills.

"Guess I better go on home so Belle won't worry any more. Mind if I leave her here and come back after her later?"

"'Course not, better let her stay the night, and you take care of yourself when you get home. Think you can make it now?"

"Wind's gone down a lot, I can make it all right."

When Ruthie failed to get better in the days that followed, Tom took her to the doctor, who looked grave and gave her some medicine, which seemed to do no good. Soon she too developed a bad cough, and when that passed into pneumonia, Belle and Tom stared at one another with

the thought in the mind of each, that here was a new battle which would be more than either could stand.

Despite all efforts, Ruthie continued to get worse, and a month later she died, her little face and body a shrunken image.

Tom and Belle were left with their four boys, and for a long time the dread of losing one of those clung in their hearts.

But they were destined to keep their sons, and to be outlived by them, for they grew fast and sturdily, and soon Pat was taller even than his father.

CHAPTER X

A great change had taken place in the Beaver Valley since the first time Tom Plumb had seen it.

Sitting on the porch in front of his blacksmith shop, he sucked on his pipe and reflected back over the events of his life.

A letter had come from Mac that day, saying that he had bought a house in Lincoln, and would not be returning to the little village. Tom had been acutely disappointed at this news, for though Mac had been gone a long time now, Tom had always cherished the hope that some day he would return.

Tom, too, had changed in the last years. He had started to talk more, now that memories filled his life. Many times the children of the town could be found down in the blacksmith shop listening to Tom Plumb tell stories of the Indian days, or the discovery of a lost wagon party right on the land where the old Plumb homestead still was.

Mothers never worried about their offspring when they knew that they were with Tom, for he had always been a good steady man, if not always ambitious.

The three older boys were almost grown now, and already going with girls. Tom grinned as he remembered back when

he was their age, and could see himself as the backward boy that he was, especially around the girls. He had a vague thought that he shouldn't have been that way, with so many sisters, and then he remembered that he had not known his sisters too well, and that Mac had been responsible for that.

Even more vaguely, the question of Mac and his bachelorhood entered his mind, and then Tom's memories went back to Jane and the spot she had filled in his life.

"Guess I'm gettin' old," he reflected. "People say you are when ya' start thinkin' back."

Presently he rose and went over to the house where Belle was getting dinner. She had never learned how to cook, in all these years, he thought. Poor old Belle! He hadn't given her much of a life, he guessed. She was still thin; she had always been too thin. He glanced down at his own figure, which had taken on considerable weight, and grinned. Maybe he'd eaten too much for her to have enough to make her fat, he thought.

The boys were gone, all except hi, and the three of them sat down to eat. Tom and Belle did not talk much, but the boy rattled on continuously. Tom was thankful that he was there, and he suspected that Belle was, too. They didn't have a great deal to say to each other. He guessed they never had.

After he had eaten, Tom went out to walk down the

road, and along the creek. The same old cottonwoods and elms were there, the same old bends in the creek bed, with some new one which had been cut by the various rains. He thought he could pick the exact spot where he and Mac had camped that first night when they had met Andy Nightengale. Good old Andy! He'd gone to the great beyond many years before, but there would never live a better man than he.

Then Tom thought of his own father, and how anxious he had been that his parents should come to Nebraska. He wondered what had happened to cause the break which had come between him and his father. Whatever it was, Tom had forgotten now.

Far up in the trees the birds sang lustily, and the warm afternoon sun shone down on Tom's shoulders. It felt pretty good, for he'd been bothered some with rheumatism the past year.

On and on he walked, past the houses and farm land, across the creek and out onto the open plain. He reached the knob of a hill and began to climb it. The thick grama grass grew tall around his feet, and when he reached the top he sat down to rest.

He awoke with a start several hours later. He had not intended to go to sleep, only to rest for a few minutes. The sun had almost sunk, and the red of the western sky caught his eye. He stood up and looked toward it. His

body cast a dark silhouette as he shaded his eyes.

Suddenly around the bend of the creek below him, an approaching object became visible. Tom stared down at it for a moment, and then chuckled softly. It was "young" Jack Wilson's third Model-T ford.

THE END

- 0 -

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

Andreas, A. T. History of the State of Nebraska. Chicago, The Western Historical Company, 1882, pp. 10-25, 130-5.

Contains a full account of the growth of the state, and the development of the counties, cities, towns, and villages.

Cather, Willa. My Antonia. Boston and New York, The Houghton Mifflin Company, The Riverside Press, 1926. 371p.

The story of the Bohemian Settlers in Nebraska.

Dorsey, George A. The Pawnee Mythology. Washington, D.C., The Carnegie Institution, 1906. 250p.

Contains stories and legends pertaining to the Pawnee Indians.

Dorsey, George A. Traditions of the Skidi Pawnee. Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1904. 366p., (Memoirs of "The American Folk-lore Society," vol. VIII).

Gives outstanding traditions of the tribe.

Hicks, John D. The Populist Revolt. Minneapolis, The University of Minnesota Press, 1931. 423p.

Gives a complete history of the work of the Populist party.

Ise, Dr. John. Sod and Stubble. New York, Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1938. 326p.

The story of a Kansas homestead.

Streeter, Floyd B. Prairie Trails and Cow Towns. Boston, Chapman and Grimes, Mount Vernon Press, 1936. 218p.

An unusually interesting book on the old West. Gives a vivid atmospheric detail for pioneer work.

Streeter, Floyd B. The Kaw; The Heart of a Nation. New York and Toronto, Farrar and Rinehart, Inc., 1941. 350p.

Gives a story of the Kaw river, with good description and atmosphere.

Watkins, Albert. "The Beginning of Red Willow County." (Nebraska Historical Society Collections. Lincoln, Nebraska, 1919, vol. XIX, pp. 29-63).

The story of Massacre Canyon, and historical facts concerning the county.

Magazines

Bengtson, B. E. "Grand Pawnee Village." (Nebraska History Magazine, April-June, 1933, pp. 124-129).

A description of the villages of the Pawnees.

"Grasshoppers Again." (Nebraska History Magazine, April-June, 1934, p. 123).

The story of the grasshopper invasion of 1874.

Personal Correspondence

Bull, Mrs. Emma J. Santa Ana, California.

Mrs. Bull is the writer's great aunt.

Dimmitt, Mrs. T. J. Marion, Nebraska.

Much valuable family material obtained.

Furman, A. C. Danbury, Nebraska.

Mr. Furman was a personal childhood friend of the writer's hero.

Powell, Marion. Lincoln, Nebraska.

Mr. Powell is the man for whom the village of Marion was named.

Stilgebourer, G. S. Benkleman, Nebraska.

Mr. Stilgebourer was a personal friend of the writer's family and hero.

Personal Interviews

(Note: From the following interviews the writer received much valuable information concerning the characters in the story, and also personal family history.)

Ambler, Mrs. Mary. Marion, Nebraska. June 15, 1941.

Dimmitt, Mrs. T. J. Marion, Nebraska. April 13, 1941.

Furman, A. C. Danbury, Nebraska. June 11, 1941.

Hill, Mrs. S. C. Marion, Nebraska. June 11, 1941.

(Note: The following people were helpful in obtaining general background information regarding many historical facts.)

McGinnis, Myrta E. Hays, Kansas. June-July, 1941.

Streeter, Floyd B. Hays, Kansas. June-July, 1941.

Newspapers

Beaver Valley News. Danbury, Nebraska, Jan. 25, 1897-
April 30, 1923.

Furnished an article which had been written by the writer's hero sometime before his death. Also much history of the settlement of the valley.

McCook Daily Gazette. McCook, Nebraska. June, 1900-
June, 1909.

Articles about the settling of the southwestern part of Nebraska.

The Oberlin Herald. Oberlin, Kansas. June, 1879-June, 1880.

Material concerning the Indian raid of the Cheyenne Indians.

South Side Sentinel. Marion, Nebraska, Jan., 1910-Jan., 1934.

Valley history and a copy of the editor's personal interview with the writer's hero.

Manuscripts

Streeter, Floyd B. Hays, Kansas. Dance Calls and Party Songs, 1 folder.

Family Genealogy

Plumb, H. B. The Plumb Family. M.P., 1893 . 135 p.

The genealogy of the Plumb family from 1180 to 1917, giving the coat of arms, and a complete record of the branches of the family.