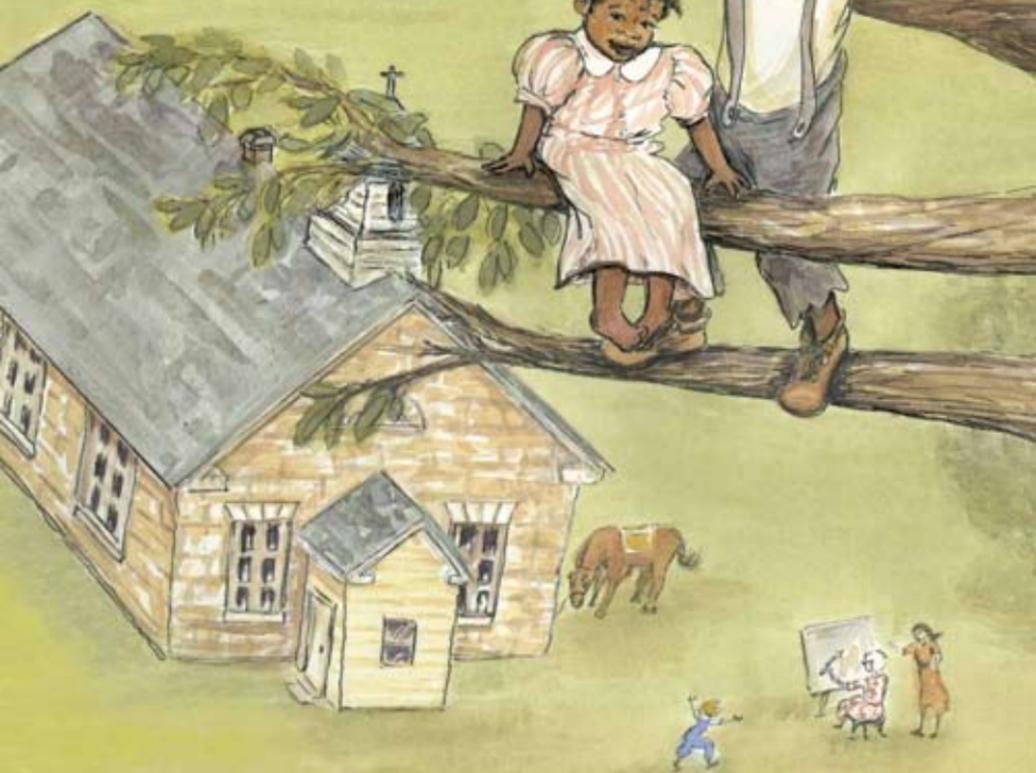


Dawn of Day

J.A. McPhail

illustrated by
Gwen Battis



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Irma Jean looked up at me proud as could be. I ruffled her boy-cropped hair and then turned my attention back to Maude's painting. She added another shingle to the church roof with the gray-brown mixture she'd made.

"See here, girls? These shingles I'm painting are like the ones your great-grandpa carved out of wood by hand. All he used was a broad ax and a knife. The folks founded this church in 1857 and finished this building five years later."

"Hey," said Irma Jean, "1857 was seventy-five years ago, wasn't it? That's why we're having a party this Sunday!"

She acted very pleased with herself for figuring it out, but I had a feeling she'd overheard Mama and Myra talking about it.

"Very good, Irma Jean," Maude said. "You'll do well with your numbers when you go to school this fall."

Maude put her brush down, wiped her hands on her paint rag, and brushed a lock of silver hair from her eyes. She turned away from her easel, crossed her ankles, and placed her hands in her lap, giving us her undivided attention.

"How would you girls like to hear the story about how my father became Captain Mitchell of the Prairie Guards?"

Irma Jean didn't act too interested until Maude leaned in close like she was telling a secret and whispered, "He was almost hanged, you know."

"Hanged? Like from a rope? Yes, tell us, please!" Irma Jean clapped her hands together several times. "And don't forget about the wagon."

Maude looked directly in our eyes as she began to speak.

"My father, William Mitchell, was what was known as a conductor on the Underground Railroad and our log cabin was a station house." Maude nodded toward her painting. "That wagon right there carried many runaway slaves to their freedom."

Usually I wouldn't have wanted a history lesson in the summertime. But there was something about Maude's face that made me want to hear more. She looked like a little child, excited to set out on a grand adventure. I settled back to listen as Maude resumed her story.

"It was the spring of 1856. A famous preacher from New York, Rev. Henry Ward Beecher, was the special speaker at a church in Connecticut. My daddy was in the meeting that day. He'd already agreed to join about seventy other men, and move to the Kansas Territory. Many

of them had to leave family, friends and everything that was familiar to them. But they believed in freedom for all men and that's why they came."

Irma Jean rested her head against my shoulder. She wrapped her hand around the crook of my arm as Maude continued.

"When the Connecticut Kansas Company arrived here in late April, they found some others already settled here, including you girl's great-grandpa John. Together, they founded the town of Wabaunsee. That's a Potawatomi Indian name, and it means exactly how they felt about coming to Kansas. It was a brand new 'Dawn of Day.'"

Henrietta never liked history. But on a late summer day in 1932, she and her sometimes annoying little sister Irma Jean, hear an exciting true story from their artist friend, Maude Mitchell—a story that takes them back in time 75 years.

In 1856, Maude's father, William Mitchell, came from Connecticut to support the Free State cause in Kansas. William and his sister Agnes hid runaway slaves in their cabin, including Jesse and Abby, two slave children who'd been cruelly separated from their mother.

Henrietta had learned about the Underground Railroad at school, but she never realized how dangerous it was for everyone involved. But what has slavery got to do with the family secret and Aunt Jo being mad at her parents?

As the pieces of the puzzle begin to come together, Henrietta discovers a surprise from the past that nobody dreamed was possible.



"Set in a time when children still rode horses to school, Dawn of Day is an enchanting story about family history being passed on from one generation to the next. Based on historic events during the turbulent period of our nation's history known as "Bleeding Kansas," this is a book that is interesting, entertaining, and educational. It's not often that one book successfully combines all three."

—Michael Stubbs, Kansas Historian

"Dawn of Day is an engaging introduction to a little-known part of Kansas history—the pre-Civil War immigration of abolitionists into the Territory to help 'Bleeding Kansas' join the Union as a free state. The book offers a fictional but realistic glimpse into the lives of the Mitchells and other families who settled in Wabaunsee, who were involved in the fight for freedom and the secret activities of the Underground Railroad."

—Kathryn Mitchell Buster, great-niece of Maude Mitchell

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