

Friend on the Trail

Chapter Two - by Kay Hively

Martha lifted the empty stew pot off the campfire, being careful not to get her dress in the fire. With the help of her little brother, Jonathan, she began to clean the supper dishes. Martha's father sat on a blanket near the fire. He had brought little Ruth out of the wagon and laid her on the blanket with him.

Matt, her 15-year-old brother, was milking Old Blue.

The day was coming to an end. Using sand and water that Matt had brought from a small stream, Martha and Johnny soon had the black pot and the tin plates and cups clean. Matt finished milking the cow, then took his bucket around to all the campfires, offering milk to anyone in need.

When Ruth fell asleep on the blanket, Mr. O'Connor put her back in her little box in the wagon. Then he helped Martha make beds under the wagon for her and her two brothers. Before they laid down for the night, Martha and Johnny climbed into the wagon and kissed their mother good-night.

By the time Matt returned with his empty milk bucket, everyone was in bed.

He rinsed the bucket and then lay down by his brother. Only an occasional grunt from one of the oxen broke the silent night. One by one the campfires died down, leaving only a million stars and a huge moon to light the night.

Martha had no trouble going to sleep. She was tired from the long day of work. Her back and arms ached. Because the soles of her shoes were thin, sharp rocks made her feet sore. But sleep made her forget her pain, and a good night's rest made everything better.

Every night Martha dreamed of a farm in the Oregon Territory. Her parents had talked of nothing else since they left Missouri.

The picture her parents had painted of the new land made her believe it was right next door to heaven. In her dreams, Martha could see fields of corn, barns filled with horses and cows, lush green pastures and trees overloaded with fruit.

It was always a wonderful dream.

But on this night, Martha's dream was interrupted by a bump on her arm.

Thinking it was Johnny wiggling in his bed, Martha decided to move her bed farther away from her brothers. But, just as she opened her eyes, a hand was slapped across her mouth. Unable to call out, all Martha could do was stare into the face of an Indian who crouched on the ground beside her bed.

Martha had never seen an Indian up close. All the way along the Oregon Trail there had been Indians passing off in the distance. Once or twice some of the men in the wagon train had ridden out to trade with them, but Martha had never seen one in camp. She had heard stories about Indians attacking settlers, burning them out of their homes and even killing them.

Martha did not want to die. She wanted to see that farm in Oregon. Who would take care of her mother and little Ruth? This was not a good time to die.



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Classroom Extensions

Things to Think About and Do -

- A. The O'Connor family is going to farm in Oregon Territory. What kind of farming is done in Oregon? What are the major crops?
- B. When did Oregon become a state? What mountain ranges are in Oregon?

Next Week: Chapter Three – Indians!