

Friend on the Trail

Chapter Four - by Kay Hively

Inside the wagon, Martha lifted Ruth out of her bed. Crawling on her knees to the front of the wagon, Martha sat by her mother. Ruth was crying loudly and Mrs. O'Connor was screaming out of her head.

Martha heard more noise and confusion outside. Men were yelling back and forth at each other about Indians. Martha expected gunfire at any moment.

She waited to hear the war whoops of Indians attacking the wagon train.

As she listened to all the noise, Martha picked up little Ruth and laid the baby in her mother's arms. Instantly, Mrs. O'Connor stopped screaming. Even though she seemed to be in a fog, the sick woman took her baby and held it close to her chest. The baby's loud crying became a whimper and then stopped completely.

The noise outside had also quieted down. Martha wanted to go to the back of the wagon and see what was going on. But she knew she should stay with her mother and Ruth. As she waited, Martha saw Matt standing at the back of the wagon. He said that Indians had been spotted, but he didn't think they would attack. They were not wearing paint or making any threats.

Since Mrs. O'Connor and Ruth were both asleep, Martha carefully picked up the baby and laid her back in her bed. Then Martha leaned over the end of the wagon. Off in the distance she could see her father and three other men from the wagon train. They were talking to some Indians on horseback. One of the Indians seemed to be the leader. He was doing all the talking. As Martha looked at the men, she recognized the Indian doing the talking. He was the one she had seen last night.

Soon, Mr. O'Connor and the other men started back to their wagons. Five Indians on horses followed them. When they all reached the wagon train, the Indians got off their horses.

Martha saw her father and the Indian leader coming toward their wagon. Not knowing what to do, she dropped down in the wagon box. She heard her father introduce the Indian to her brothers, Matt and Johnny. Martha's father called the Indian Wapalit.

Martha raised up to look over the back of the wagon. As she did, her father and the Indian came and stood at the back of the wagon. The Indian with the kind face looked at Martha. With a smile, he said, "My white friends call me Joe. You can call me Joe."

Mr. O'Connor lifted Martha over the back end of the wagon and stood her on the ground. Then "Joe" and Martha's father climbed into the wagon. Martha watched as the two men crawled up beside her mother. The Indian put his hand on Mrs. O'Connor's forehead.

After a few moments, the two men came out of the wagon. As "Joe" started to leave, he told Martha not to worry any more about her mother. He said he had come to make her and all the other sick people well again.



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Classroom Extensions

Things to Think About and Do -

- A. What do you think about Martha's mother cuddling her baby? Write a poem telling how you feel about babies. The poem can be funny or serious.
- B. Do you think "Joe" can make the sick people well? What did Native Americans call their doctors?

Next Week: Chapter Five – Medicine in a Bag