

Friend on the Trail

Chapter Seven - by Kay Hively

Everyone was up early the next morning. Martha's mother was able to get out of the wagon. She even drank a cup of milk and ate a biscuit. She said Martha's biscuits were very good. After breakfast, Mr. O'Connor and Johnny began working on the wagon. Even though Matt grumbled that laundry was women's work, he and Martha took the dirty clothes and blankets to the stream.

Several women were already there washing their clothes. Matt didn't want to wash clothes with the women. He and Martha moved down stream, away from all the others.

The water was very cold and Martha had no soap. One by one she took each piece of laundry and soaked it in the stream. Wiggling each piece back and forth, she got everything as clean as she could. When she finished each piece, she handed it to Matt. He twisted and squeezed out as much water as he could. Then he spread everything over some bushes that grew near the stream.

Martha's hands got very cold in the water, but she was glad to have clean clothes. For many days everyone had been walking in dust and dirt and there had been no way to take a bath or clean their clothes.

Matt said they could leave the clothes on the bushes. When the sun warmed up and the winds blew, he said, the clothes and bedding would dry very fast.

As they were spreading the last blanket over a bush, Matt and Martha heard a cry for help. Looking upstream, Martha could see someone in the water. It was a woman. Martha could see her bonnet in the water. The drowning woman was coming toward Matt and Martha.

Quickly Matt waded into the stream. The water was cold and deep. After only a few steps, the water was so deep that Matt had to swim. Martha watched in fear as her brother moved to the center of the stream. As the woman came floating by, Matt reached out and grabbed her dress. But the current was very swift. Martha was afraid both of them would be swept away.

Matt struggled hard, trying to get to shallow water. Martha spotted a branch lying on the shore. Taking it by one end, she stretched it out toward her brother. With a big lunge, Matt was able to grab the branch.

Pulling hard, Martha helped her brother and the woman to shore.

By the time Matt was able to get onto his feet, several people had come to help. Many hands reached out and took the woman from Matt's arms.

Matt and the woman both lay on the ground exhausted. Soon, the woman began to cough and was able to talk. Someone wrapped a dry blanket around the shivering woman. Someone else draped a coat over Matt's shoulders as he sat on the ground.

Martha was so proud of her brother that she bent down and kissed him on his cheek. Matt smiled at his little sister and said, "You can tell Pa that I've already had my bath."



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Classroom Extensions

Things to Think About and Do -

- Do you know the proper way to rescue someone who is drowning? What is the "throw, tow and go" rule? Visit or call a Red Cross office and ask for rescue and water safety information.
- Matt said that laundry was "women's work." Do you agree? Why? Why not?

Next Week: Chapter Eight - Celebration