

TROUBLE RIVER

**BETSY
BYARS**



By the author of the
Newbery Medal-winning
The Summer of the Swans



An Uneasy Feeling

The woman sat in the door of the cabin rocking in her chair. With the hem of her apron she fanned herself, saying over and over, "Where is that boy? Where is that boy?"

She rose and moved to the open doorway where she looked out over the golden prairie.

"Dewey!" she called, her voice breaking with anxiety. "*Deweeeeeee.*"

When there was no answer, she went back to her rocking chair.

"Dewey Martin," she called from her chair. "Oh, *Deweeee.*"

After a moment she went to stand in the doorway again. For as far as she could see there was only the prairie, the long waving line of grass on the horizon with not one single cabin or chimney in sight.

The sun was dropping behind the horizon, and

she knew how quickly darkness would cover the land, how quickly the colorful prairie would become desolate and cold. The lines between her brows deepened.

"Well, I reckon I'll just have to go find him," she said to herself.

Holding her walking cane and the side of the door for support, she stepped from the cabin and stood looking uncertainly about her. In the high grass to her right a grouse flew up, and she started, clutching her cane tightly.

She feared the prairie with its strange sounds and long stillnesses. She had grown up in a town where one could hear the thud of a neighbor's ax, the drone of the sawmill, the ring of the ferry bell, the comforting sounds of other people. Here there was only the lonely sighing of grass bent by the wind.

"Dewey," she called again. Her voice was softer, for now, outside the cabin, she feared not only for the boy's safety but for her own. "Dewey! Answer me, boy, if you hear me!"

Hobbling slightly, she walked around the cabin toward the rise that overlooked the river. The dry prairie wind whipped her skirt about her thin legs. "Dewey! Dewey! Oh, where is that boy? *Deweeeeeee!*"

Her answer came from below on the river. "What do you want, Grandma?"

"Dewey Martin, I want you to get yourself up here right now. That's what I want. You hear me?"

"I'll be there in a minute."

"Right now!"

"I'll be there in just one more minute," he said. "I'm doing something real important."

"All right, you just stay on down there doing what's so important," she said, "and when your pa gets home and asks did you mind, I'm going to say, 'That boy never minded me at all. He was doing something too *important* to mind. He was—'"

"I'm coming, I'm coming."

"I ain't talking about coming in a hour or two. I want you right now."

Before she saw the boy, she saw his dog running up the path and she shook her cane at him and said, "Don't you upset me now, you worthless critter." The dog ran past her. He knew the boy was heading for the cabin, and there was no greater pleasure in his life than beating him to the cabin and being there to greet him in the doorway.

"I don't see you, Dewey," the woman warned.

"I'm right here, Grandma."

She was silent as he made his way up the path, and then she said, "Look at them feet." With her cane she pointed to the boy's feet, stained brown with mud from the river. He expected her to send him to the well with a gourd of soft soap. Instead

Safety is downriver—but first there's trouble ahead.



As soon as Dewey Martin sees the Indian creeping toward the cabin—and toward his unsuspecting grandmother—he knows what to do: knock him down and take off before the rest of the raiding party arrives.

The only means of escape is Dewey's homemade raft, and lying in its path are rapids, wolves, Indians, and forty miles of uncharted river. Can a boy who's never manned an oar and an old frontierswoman be the first to make it down Trouble River?

"[An] original, suspenseful story of pioneer life, enlivened by touches of humor and vivid characterizations."
—*Booklist*

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A PUFFIN BOOK

U.S.A. \$5.99
CAN. \$7.50

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ISBN 978-0-14-034243-7



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