

a breakfast serials story

Desolation Canyon

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Chapter 1 White Water!

Coyotes on the canyon rim woke us early—or was it Wild Man Willie yowling, "Come 'n' get it!"?

Dad mumbled, and I gazed at the ghosts of the nightmare still floating around inside our tent. *Willie's son, Cassidy, was lifting a huge stone high over my head. Water burst white and a swirling dark hole funneled down, down.*

"Come on, Aaron," Dad muttered, and we crawled out of our tent and followed our noses.

At the camp kitchen, I picked up an enamel plate from a stack, shoveled piles of food on it, and sat down on a stump. I dug into the pancakes and bacon and watched Wild Man Willie make a pot of coffee—Vietnam style. Big old coffeepot filled with boiling water and tons of coffee grounds. He took it by the handle and spun it round and round, like a windmill. "Separates the grounds from the coffee," Willie growled. If that pot flew off the handle, someone could get killed.

Dad told me that Willie had been a squad leader way back in the Vietnam War. Dad had met him and Roger the Rogue in the army. Now the three buddies were on one of their annual white-water trips down wild

ivers. This year it was the Green River in Desolation Canyon, deep in the Utah desert.

This was my first time white-water rafting. Willie's boy Cassidy—two years older than me—had gone on lots of trips. And the other kid, Lisa—Roger's daughter—had too. Like me, Lisa was missing a week of seventh grade to go rafting.

"Where's Cassidy?" asked Roger. His eyes twinkled above a wicked goatee. He shoved blond curls beneath his spotted red bandanna.

"*C-A-A-S-S-I-I-I-D-Y-Y-Y!*" howled Wild Man Willie.

Only the river called back, a quiet hiss.

Willie dashed the last of his coffee into the sand and leaped barefoot through prickles and stones towards Cassidy's tent. With his huge arms he heaved the back of the tent up and over and dumped Cassidy out, still curled in his boxers.

Lisa laughed, and covered her mouth.

Cassidy just lay there. One eye opened. Then the other.

Then he rolled back into a handspring and landed like a cat in the warm sand.

Lisa clapped. Something twisted in my heart. Here's this girl—maybe the cutest I've ever seen—flinging her

black ponytail back and applauding Cassidy, a bad kid if there ever was one.

Dad had told me all about him, warned me to stay away from him. Said he'd been in juvie for breaking some man's leg with a baseball bat when he was only my age, which is twelve. Said his mother had died when he was little and that Willie "had his hands full with this one."

Cassidy stood up and wiped sand from his hard body. He was burnt lobster red after spending all day yesterday in the hot sun. His muscles coiled like snakes as he brushed his body clean.

"Let's get this show on the road!" Willie said. "You missed breakfast."

"I ain't hungry," Cassidy said.

"Now," said Willie.

Cassidy picked up his sleeping bag and wrapped it around his head and body so only his eyes peered out. Lisa grinned.

"*Pronto!*" Willie barked.

* * *

Like yesterday—our first on the river—it took about an hour to break camp, pump air into the three big rafts, strap down any gear that could bounce off in the rapids, and take off.

Yesterday it was a lazy river, with lots of hard rowing. Dad was teaching me how. These rafts had long oars instead of paddles, and you had to put your legs and back into each long pull. Like yesterday, here the river was flat. There was plenty of time to gaze up at the high

reddish-brown walls of the canyon, topped with magnificent buttes and towers. And there was plenty of time to get bored.

As if reading my mind, Dad said, "You're gonna love it today. And by the end of the trip, you're gonna learn to read the river like a pro."

The river started to get faster. It seemed to suck us along. I was facing backwards, so I was forced to twist my neck around to see what was coming.

Then I heard it.

"Listen," Dad said.

"What is it?" I asked.

"White water!" he shouted.

I could feel a cold spray. Then all of a sudden the water was white, as if thousands of white rabbits were jumping around us. My heart danced in my stomach. Dad tapped my shoulder. He was going to take over.

Suddenly I lost my grip and the right oar was ripped out of my hand! The handle conked me in the head. My mind went black.

Next Week: The Wild Bunch

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