

a breakfast serials story

Desolation Canyon

Written by Jonathan London

Illustrated by Maile Pickett



Chapter 2 The Wild Bunch

The story so far: Aaron, Lisa, and Cassidy, along with their dads, set out on a white-water rafting expedition on the Green River, through Desolation Canyon, Utah. The first time they hit rough water, Aaron gets into trouble.

I was drowning. I was flailing and fighting and kicking and gagging. I was spinning round and round and bouncing, bouncing like on a trampoline, but this was not fun.

I was shaking. No, somebody was shaking me. My eyes popped open. "What happened?" I spluttered.

"You okay?" It was Dad. The sun behind him made a halo around his bony face, his nest of hair.

My head was throbbing. I reached up and felt the golf ball poking up beneath the skin of my forehead.

"You took a spill," Dad said, chuckling, and pulled me up beside him. It wasn't till then that I realized I'd

been lying in the bottom of the raft, in about six inches of water. I rubbed the golf ball on my head.

"Nasty bump you got there, Aaron." He smiled and patted my shoulder. We were floating lazily down another long, smooth stretch of river now. I looked around. There was Wild Man Willie, not twenty feet away, in the "kitchen boat." He was laughing like a monkey.

"Took a nosedive on your first Class 3 rapid!" he said. "Thought your dad had caught him a big trout, the way you were slapping around in the bottom of that boat!"

Beside him Cassidy just hunkered, grinning and shaking his head. "Hey, fool," he said. "Better buckle your seat belt next time." Har har.

Lisa, up ahead in the lead raft with her father, was standing, staring at me. I couldn't tell in the sun glare if she was smiling or concerned for me, or what. I probably turned redder in the face than the sun had already burned it.

I rubbed my head again. And I rubbed my right shoulder, which felt like it had been yanked almost right out of my body.

"On a scale of 5," Dad said, "Class 3 is just a taste of what's to come downriver. Next time, hang on to that oar till I can take over, kiddo."

I was still catching my breath when I heard Roger holler, "Pull out!"

* * *

Sitting around, chowing down, Cassidy spun his baseball cap backwards on his head and said, "Willie,"—that's what he called his dad—"what was that you were saying the other day about the Wild Bunch?"

Willie crouched down in the sand before the three of us—Cassidy, Lisa, and me. In his floppy, battered Indiana Jones hat, he looked like a short, powerful Harrison Ford with a big belly hard as iron. "Well, I was saying how Butch Cassidy and his Wild Bunch used to use this here canyon—Desolation Canyon—for their escape routes after holding up banks back in the late eighteen hundreds."

"You mean like Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid?"

"Not exactly like in the movies," said Willie. "But legends about the Wild Bunch grew faster than weeds. Law was always after them, and half the time folks were on the *outlaws'* side. You wouldn't want to get on their *wrong* side."

Cassidy, I was thinking, and snatched a look at Willie's son, with his wide shoulders and thick muscles. Same name. Does that make us part of the Wild Bunch?

I hopped up and said to Lisa, "Race ya!"

She tore after me, and soon flew, on her long legs, right by me. I'm fast but she was faster.

Great chunks of stone littered the foot of the canyon walls. Up above, you could see dark caves in the red rock. "Watch out for mountain lions!" I hollered. Lisa climbed ahead of me like a wildcat herself, sending sharp little flecks of stone into my face and hair.

By the time we reached the first cave, sweat stung my eyes. It's always scary stepping into a dark place, but Lisa led the way. It was cool inside the darkness of the cave, and at first I was glad because it was scorching hot out. But soon an icy shiver ran up and down my spine.

"We shoulda brought a flashlight," I said.

That's when we heard the growl, echoing through the cave. My hair prickled, my muscles tensed.

ROAAAAAARRRRRRRRRR!

We jumped about three feet straight up and fell all over each other trying to get out.

But a dark shadow blocked the cave entrance.

Next Week: Danger

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