

a breakfast serials story

The Valley of No Return

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Chapter 1 The Discovery

JAMES EDWARD "JAMIE" MERRIMAN, age 13, was returning from the creek with a bucket of water when suddenly, he was surrounded by Indians.

There were half a dozen of them, wearing government issued pants and shirts, their faces streaked with red paint. The leader—a boy Jamie recognized as Lucco Putesuy—rushed forward holding out his clasped hands; he opened them suddenly, and out rushed a huge, shiny orange-and-black beetle.

Jamie ducked away so quickly that his bucket tilted and spilled water on the ground. The boys hooted with delight and dashed back into a grove of cottonwoods, vanishing as suddenly as they had appeared.

Jamie sighed and brushed the foul-looking, but apparently harmless, bug aside. Then he headed back to the creek to get more water. As he walked, the light rain that had been falling off and on for the past week began coming down again.

This kind of teasing had been constant ever since Jamie and his father had arrived, three months ago, to take up residence with the Havasupai Indians in Arizona. Jamie knew the boys meant him no real harm, but they

remained suspicious and unfriendly, and they missed no opportunity to make him feel like an outsider.

Jamie missed his home with his grandparents in San Francisco, where he lived during the school year. He had lost his mother and younger sister in the terrible earthquake that had all but destroyed the city three years earlier, in 1906. Since that time he had spent summers traveling with his father.

Jamie had been excited when he'd learned that this year they would be going to Havasu, a major branch of the Grand Canyon. But the hardships of the trip and the crude conditions of life with the Havasupai—or "Pai" as they called themselves—had soon grown tiresome.

The Pai had no reason to be friendly. Jamie's father, Captain Daniel Merriman, U.S. Army, had been sent to the region to search for minerals. If he found anything of value—gold, silver, or copper—the federal government would take this canyon away from the tribe. It was the last remaining bit of their territory, one that once had stretched hundreds of miles across the surrounding plateaus.

Jamie knew that everyone in the village hoped the mission would fail, and he couldn't help sharing their feeling. In spite of his sense of isolation, he loved the canyon, which was the most beautiful place he'd ever been. The clear, blue-green water of the creek ran down

through a series of four waterfalls until it reached the Colorado River almost twenty miles to the north. The only way into the canyon from the south, or land side, was on horseback or afoot down a dizzying switchback trail carved into the side of the great White Cliff.

Supai Village, the only settlement in the valley, was located near the first of the falls. It was made up of a collection of *hawas*—huts made of thatched willows. Surrounding the *hawas* were groves of peach trees and gardens, where corn and other vegetables grew. There was also a corral with two-dozen horses and some pack mules.

Somewhat apart from the village stood a large U.S. Army tent. As Jamie walked toward it, he saw his father and another man standing outside looking south at the trail into the village. Three men on horseback were approaching. They were leading a string of mules, the supply train that had been expected for several days.

Captain Merriman was a tall man. He wore a khaki shirt and shorts, brown leather boots, and a wide-brimmed hat. His face was darkly tanned and bore a handlebar moustache of which he was very proud. He waxed it every single day.

Jamie recognized the other man as Wilman Manakita, the headman of the village. He was wrapped in a Navajo woven blanket, coarse cotton pants, and boots that had been a gift from the captain. He smiled when he saw Jamie, and raised his hand in greeting.

"Your people come," he said, pointing down the trail. "You will leave us soon, I think."

Jamie had been surprised, at first, to learn that Mr. Manakita spoke English so well. Few white people ever learned the Yuman dialect spoken by the Havasupai. Jamie had picked up a few words during the summer—not enough to speak the language, but enough to understand some of what was said to him.

He looked at his father. "Are we really going?" he asked.

The captain nodded. "In a day or two, after the men and horses are rested. Those last ore samples look very promising," he added with a satisfied smile. "There's silver in this valley, Jamie. Enough to interest a mining company, that's for certain."

Jamie glanced at Manakita, and saw pain and anger in the man's face. The Pai chieftain understood full well what the Captain's discovery could mean to his village and its people.

Next Week: Dead Man's Falls

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