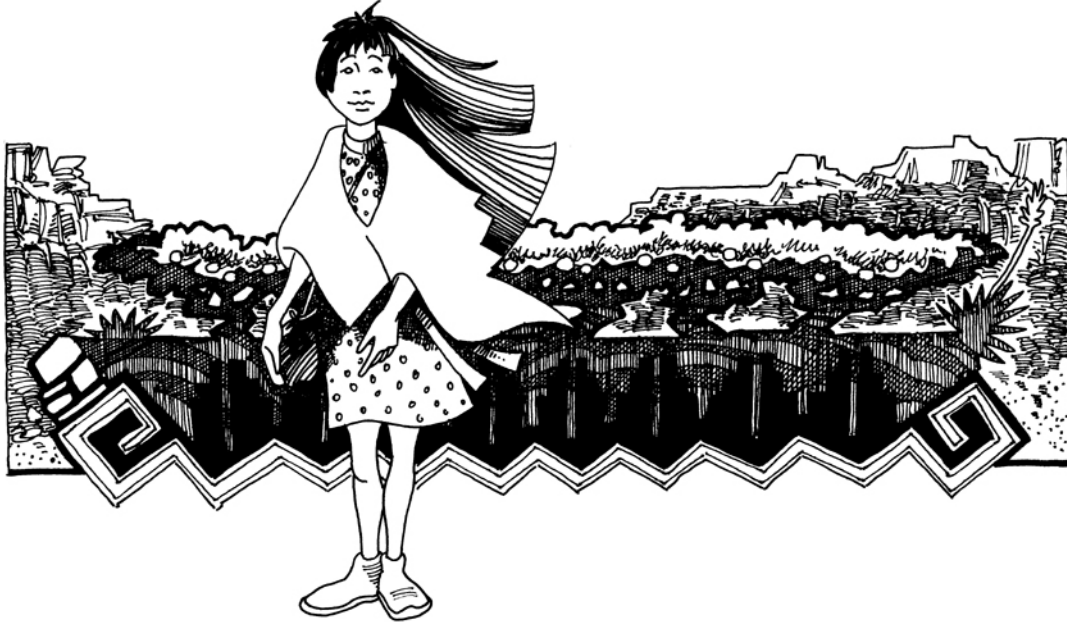


a breakfast serials story

The Valley of No Return

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Chapter 2 Dead Man's Falls

The story so far: The year is 1909. Jamie Merriman and his father are living with the Havasupai Indians in Havasu Canyon. The captain has found silver in the valley—but what will happen to the people living there when his discovery becomes known?

Rain fell again during the night, keeping Jamie awake. When at last he succeeded in drifting off to sleep, it seemed only moments before he heard the hiss of eggs frying and the smell of coffee brewing.

"*Reveille!*" his father called, and imitated a bugle call through pursed lips. "Lots to do today. Got to start packing up."

Jamie felt under his mattress for his underwear and shirt. He squirmed into them before throwing back the blanket and pulling on his pants, socks, and shoes. By the time he was dressed, breakfast was ready.

They ate eggs, bacon, and slices of a coarse brown Indian bread that Jamie didn't much care for, but that tasted good fried in bacon fat. He wasn't too fond of

coffee with goat's milk, either, but the drink helped warm him.

After eating, and before setting off on his daily trip for water, Jamie peered out through the tent flap. The sky remained dark with clouds, but the rain had stopped for the moment. Through the lingering mist he made out the forms of two people coming from the direction of the village. A moment later he recognized Wilman Manakita, the leader of the Havasupai, and his daughter, Salia. Jamie turned to inform his father.

"Looks like the Chief's here on official business," the captain said, looking out. Mr. Manakita wore a patterned Navajo blanket over his shoulders, along with a necklace of brightly colored beads. "You'd better stay and keep Salia company while I talk to him."

Jamie's father called Mr. Manakita "Chief," although the word the Pai actually used meant something more like "Speaker." It was not because the man said a whole lot—he didn't—but because he "spoke" for the whole village.

Salia was the same age as Jamie, but a head shorter, with a round face, fine black eyes, and shining black hair. She wore a finely woven shawl over a print dress and ankle-high moccasins made of tanned antelope skin. She lingered outside the tent while Wilman Manakita went inside.

"My father says you will go away now," she said to Jamie. "Is that true?"

Salia, who attended a government school, spoke English well. This made Jamie feel slightly ashamed for having learned so little of her language during his stay in the village. She was friendlier than any of the other young members of the tribe, and Jamie wondered if this was because her father had told her to be.

He nodded in response to her question.

"Then you will come with me now to see the Great Falls," she informed him.

The two of them had talked about going downstream to what the settlers called "Mooney's Falls". Others called them "Dead Man's Falls," in reference to an early explorer who'd been killed while trying to descend them. Now, Salia's invitation came as a surprise.

"Today, you mean?"

"I have food," she said, patting a pouch-like wicker basket slung from a leather strap.

Jamie went inside to ask for permission. "I guess if the Chief doesn't mind, it's all right with me," his father said. "No climbing down, though, understood? It's too dangerous."

"Yes, sir."

Jamie took time to thread the case that held his hunting knife onto his belt, and then, as an after-thought, stuffed a water-tight pouch with some emergency supplies—matches, a length of string, a compass, and an extra handkerchief—into a pocket of his oilskin coat.

"And remember to start back before it begins getting dark," his father added as Jamie left.

As Jamie and Salia passed through the village on the trail leading south, several boys began following them, shouting taunts. As usual, Lucco Putesuy was the leader. But when Salia came to a sudden halt and spun around, speaking harshly in Havasupai, the boys immediately dropped back.

Being with the daughter of the Speaker has its advantages, Jamie decided.

They followed the creek, swollen now almost to overflowing. After a mile or so, the trees and brush grew thicker, and somewhat later Jamie and Salia began to hear the sound of rushing water. They had reached Dead Man's Falls.

Jamie stood at the edge of the cliff overlooking the awesome sight. Suddenly he heard Salia shout, "Go away!" and turned to see the girl looking back up the trail. "Go back!" she cried, "or I'll tell my father, and you will be sorry!"

"Lucco follows us," she explained to Jamie. "Do not mind him, he is a . . . a *skunk*, I think your word is."

Jamie laughed.

There was a flash of lightning, followed by an ear-splitting crash of thunder, and fat drops of rain began to fall.

"Hurry!" Salia cried. "I know a place where we will be dry." She ran to the cliff's edge, knelt down, and a moment later disappeared over the rim.

Jamie looked over the edge and saw the girl climbing down a thick, knotted cord. For a moment he hesitated, remembering his father's words. But when the rain began to fall even harder he made up his mind—and started down the rope.

Next Week: Flood!

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