

Bella Bella

written by Jonathan London - illustrated by Jon Van Zyle

Chapter Two: First Nations

a breakfast serials story

STORY SO FAR: *Thirteen-year-old Aaron, his dad, and four friends are about to embark on a kayaking trip off the coast of British Colombia. As Aaron's kayak is lowered into the water by lines and a winch, one of the lines suddenly breaks.*

My heart pounded like a drum as our kayak dropped and slid almost vertically into the dark water below. Sploosh! The prow plowed in and sank clear to my cockpit before our boat popped back up and slammed the surface with a huge splash.

1 Our companions watched, with mouths wide open—until Cassidy let out a hoot and a laugh. Soon we were all laughing, shouting “Thanks!” and “Anchors away!” to the deckhands, with more sarcasm than gratitude.

But dread soon started to seep back in—at least for me. Willie had told us there were fishing boats in these waters smuggling drugs—or possibly illegal immigrants from China. And now here we were, three kayaks at midnight, rising and falling with the low swells off the village of Bella Bella, the sea a scattered nest of stars, and we—lost birds.

Bella Bella is an Indian reservation—called a “reserve” in Canada (and Native Americans are called “First Nations” or aboriginals). It's the home of the Heiltsuk Native Band, and it's off-limits to kayakers

and campers at night—unless they have permission, that is. At this hour, Bella Bella was a scattering of lights, like a few fallen stars amid the vast darkness.

“Let's roll, mates,” said Roger. He and Willie were both leader types—always sure of themselves—though Roger was usually jolly, while Willie could be moody and bossy.

“Uh, which way?” my dad asked tentatively. He sounded as lost as I felt.

“North. We'll be heading north, and then west in the morning.”

“Actually,” Cassidy said nastily, “you don't have a clue where we're gonna put in tonight, do ya, dude?”

“Cassidy—” Willie said.

“It's okay, Willie,” said Roger. “He's right. We'll just have to find an island by blind luck, or paddle all night trying.”

“I'm getting cold, Daddy,” Lisa said. “Can we get going now?” She wasn't one to complain, but there was a chilling sea breeze beneath the summer stars. As for me, I was

still seasick, and ready to dive into the oblivion of sleep.

“Let's get this show on the road!” Willie barked.

“Yee-haw!” sang Cassidy.

“And yippy-ki-yay!” Roger yodeled, then took off with Lisa, heading north. Cassidy and Willie paddled after them, with Dad and me following behind. Our kayak rode so low, it felt like we were inside the water.

I'd met them all the year before on our trip down the Green River through Desolation Canyon. Like I said,



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Cassidy had been a menacing presence during most of that trip—and Dad had nearly died. Though I had my doubts about another trip with Cassidy, I'd agreed to raft the Owahee River, but then Willy and Roger thought of coming here instead. Dad had done some river kayaking, and he taught me the rudiments on the Russian River, near where we live.

Suddenly we heard the sound of a motor zooming our way, accompanied by wild yips and whoops. Smugglers? A searchlight swept the water, and a fishing boat filled with shadowy human shapes spun around us, rocking our kayaks in its wake.

The driver slowed the motor to an idle and said, "What up, dudes? Fishin' without a license?" Rowdy laughter burst from the boat.

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"Howdy!" Roger said. "We just got dropped off by the ferry. Lookin' for some place to put in for the night."

"This the rez, man," said the driver. "You up Moose Pie Creek without a paddle." There were more howls of laughter from what I now guessed was a bunch of young Indians out having a good time.

No one said anything. We drifted with our paddles crosswise in front of us.

"Aw, I'm just foolin' with ya," the driver said, chuckling. He rubbed his buzz-cut head. "Follow me."

I think we all let out a sigh of relief, then paddled after him.

"Crazy wild Indians." Cassidy sniggered.

"Zip it!" said Willie.

"That's so not cool," Lisa said.

"Sorry," Cassidy said sarcastically. "Crazy wild First Nations."

"Shut up!" Lisa cried, exasperated.

I reminded myself that Cassidy had no mother and lived a rough life on the edge with Willie. And I knew that his best friend was a Spokane Indian. But does that,

I wondered, excuse him?

We paddled hard along the shore till we finally came to a small cove. Tall, dark trees loomed over us. And there, around twenty yards from shore, floated a large, wooden, barnacle-encrusted raft.

"You can sleep on the raft," said the driver. "No rain tonight."

"Much appreciated," Willie said, and we all thanked him.

"It ain't nuthin'," said the driver. "Just watch out you don't roll into the drink!" More hoots and howls arose from the fishing boat as he gunned it into the dark.

That night we cocooned in our sleeping bags and floated peacefully under the stars. The raft gently rocked and lulled us off to dreamland.

But in the middle of the night, I awoke to the sound of something crashing through the brush on shore. A bear, I thought. Or those Indians.

Or smugglers.

I couldn't fall back to sleep for a long time, and when I did, I wrestled with dreams of drowning and of hands pushing me down.



In the morning the raft suddenly dipped—and Lisa screamed.

to be continued...

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