

Bella Bella

written by Jonathan London - illustrated by Jon Van Zyle

Chapter Three: Wolf!

a breakfast serials story

STORY SO FAR: Aaron and his fellow kayakers have spent their first night of their kayaking trip sleeping on a large raft in a small cove. At daybreak, the raft suddenly dips. Lisa screams for help.

I froze, listening for the sound of a splash or a gunshot.

Instead I heard Cassidy laughing and Lisa swearing and promising death to her tormentor. I sat up and saw Cassidy—up to his old tricks—holding Lisa over the edge of the raft in her sleeping bag.

“Let me go, you idiot!” she squealed.

“Okay, you asked for it.”

“Cassidy!” Willie barked.

Cassidy swung Lisa back and laid her on the deck of the raft. “I’m just messin’ with her.”

“You scared the beeswax out of me,” Lisa said. Then she sat up and slugged him on the arm, hard. But you could see a glint of amusement in her eyes—a glint which cut me to the quick.

“Kids,” Willie said with a sigh and flopped back onto his sleeping mat. Dad and Roger groaned, and rolled over in their bags.

I looked around. The sun was aglow, making a halo above the trees north of Bella Bella. A bald eagle glared down at us from a shoreline spruce.

I wondered why it was called Bella Bella. It sounded like an Italian adoring a beautiful girl, or a dish of pasta.

Bella Bella!

Half an hour later the sun burst through the trees, warmed the morning mist away, and nudged Dad and Roger awake.

“Java,” Roger mumbled. He rose to his elbows and sniffed the air. He’d slept with his trademark red bandana on his head and, with his wicked reddish gray goatee and gold hoop earring glinting in the sun, he looked like a sleepy, benign pirate.

Willie had already made a strong pot of coffee on his small Svea stove. Soon we all sipped the hot black brew on our first morning at sea.

An hour later we were far out in the Inland Passage—off Gunboat Pass—quietly paddling north through the island-dotted water world. We saw a couple of ships and barges, all far away. Ice water dripped down my arms, but the spray skirt attached to the rim of the cockpit and cinched around my waist kept me dry below. My back and shoulders ached, but after a while I got

into the rhythm and almost forgot about pain. We sliced through the surface, stroke by stroke with our double-bladed paddles. We glided quickly enough to create a breeze, but quietly enough not to startle the nearby seals, who watched us with their big dark eyes.

We’d be island-hopping along this hidden coast for the next nine and a half days, living largely off what we caught and gathered from the sea. We’d be going counterclockwise in a big, jagged circle: first north and



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west through Seaforth Channel, then south through the open Pacific, then east and back north to Bella Bella. Roger and Willie had poured over charts for months as they planned this trip. But weather was an unknown... and to me, it was all an unknown.



That afternoon we grounded ashore in an island cove. The tide was out, and we had to haul our kayaks high above the tide line, slipping and sliding over small round stones. The shoreline here was rocky and wild. We tethered our boats to tree snags for the night and set out to scout the island.

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We followed a deer path through dense spruce and cedar and across a narrow spit of land, coming out on a long, white, sandy beach facing the ocean. Lisa kicked off her shoes and twirled around barefoot in the sand, her black ponytail spinning. Breakers crashed and boomed, sending up a fine spray.

"This is where we camp tonight," Willie said.

"Could get windy, mate," Roger warned.

"Keeps the bugs away."

I pulled off my river sandals and ran off down the beach—with Lisa at my heels. She moved like the wind with her long, slim legs, but this year I could match her stride for stride. Last year she was two inches taller than me; now I was getting tall and gangly.

Breathless, we stopped running, our feet sinking in wet sand. It was a joy to have Lisa at my side. I picked up a flat round stone and skimmed it across the backwash. Lisa rummaged for a stone, wound up, and skimmed it like a pro. It smacked a breaker and flapped up like a startled bird.

"Good one," I said, winging another stone. "It's great here, huh? You don't think we'll have trouble like

we did in Desolation Canyon, do you?"

"I hope not. I could do without all the drama," Lisa said—of course, meaning the trouble we'd had with Cassidy, and my dad's accident. She flicked suds at me from her fingers. I danced away, and that's when I saw the deep tracks in the wet sand.

"Wolf tracks, I think."

"Or a very large dog's," Lisa said.

The tracks ran inland toward the dry sand, where they faded out. "Hey! Guys! Wolf tracks!" I yelled.

"What?" hollered my dad.

"Wolf!"

Cassidy came running, followed by the others, and squatted down. Willie stooped beside him and pushed back his Indiana Jones hat. "Lone wolf, all right. He must be back there in the trees right now, watching us. These tracks are fresh."

"Didn't know there were wolves here," Dad said.

"Wolves, bears, deer, raccoons. They swim out from the mainland," said Roger.

"Awesome," I said.

I heard the sound of a motor and looked offshore. A commercial fishing boat was puttering by. There was a man standing on deck staring at us. I waved, but he didn't wave back. *Smugglers* flashed through my mind. We were on a deserted island, miles from anyone else. The man was large, grim faced, brutal looking. His yellow-tinted sunglasses blazed in the sun, like the eyes of a wolf.

to be continued...

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