

The Reunion Part 3

Genre: Drama, outlaw days.

Kid travels to Devil's Hole with Heyes, but what reception will he receive and will Heyes persuade him to stay?

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By Maz McCoy

Kid rode beside Heyes as he headed back to Devil's Hole. He wasn't sure going with his friend to the outlaw hideout was such a good idea. He'd heard a lot about Big Jim Santana and he wasn't convinced he'd get along with the man. In truth he didn't like taking orders from anyone. However he was tired and still hurting and the chance to rest up, somewhere safe, for a few days was appealing. He would also be able to keep an eye on Heyes and a look out for Brannigan or his men, should they finally decide to come calling.

Heyes' voice pulled him back to the present. As they made their way up into the hills, his friend was telling him about one of the gang's recent bank robberies. He would turn in the saddle every now and then to check that Kid was still listening. The blond man nodded or muttered an occasional "Uh huh" just to let him know he was paying attention.

Kid was just glad to be riding with his old friend again. It felt right having Heyes beside him. He'd missed him, but he wasn't about to admit it to anyone, least of all Heyes.

"You know you never did tell me why you joined the Gang in the first place," Kid remarked, pulling on the reins to keep his horse on the right trail.

"I needed someone to watch my back," Heyes stated, by way of explanation. Kid looked across at him and Heyes knew he had to say more. Heyes always had more to say. "I was in a poker game and forgot one of the golden rules. I was watching the pot so closely I forgot to watch the players. One man didn't take too kindly to my winning so much. He muttered a few times, when he was at the table, but I didn't think much of it. I mean we've all met sore losers before, right?"

Kid nodded.

"He was waiting for me when I came out of the saloon, later. He'd brought a couple of friends along too. They jumped me and dragged me into an alley, then started to beat the Hell out of me. Jim pulled them off me. I was in a pretty bad way, bleeding, hungry and broke. Jim took me under his wing."

"Yeah, and turned you into a bank robber. Some friend."

"Says the gunslinger," Heyes muttered, but not so quietly that Kid didn't hear.

"I told you, I don't hire out my gun!"

"I know, I know, that's not what I meant, but you've robbed a bank. Or have you chosen to forget that?" Kid chose not to reply. "I guess I still needed someone to watch my back, Kid and you were no longer around."

"Oh so it's my fault?" Kid bristled.

"I didn't say that."

"It sounded like it to me!"

Heyes pulled his horse to a halt. He'd wanted to snap back a retort but checked himself, swallowing his reply. He didn't want to antagonise Kid, not when they had only recently reconciled. Heyes drew his gun. Kid's shoulders stiffened. Heyes smiled.

"Don't worry I'm not going to shoot you for running off."

Kid's expression remained serious.

"I thought you'd be safer without me," he suddenly admitted. Heyes waited, knowing there was more his friend wanted to say. "After that run in with McKenzie." Heyes mouth dropped open. So that was the reason he'd left.

"Kid, that wasn't your fault."

"The bullet was meant for me Heyes." Blue eyes met brown ones. "Not for you."

"So all that stuff about you leaving because I was just too darn bossy, wasn't true?"

"Well I wouldn't say that." Kid finally smiled. "I mean you did like to have things your own way most of the time."

"That's because I usually had the better ideas."

"In your opinion."

Heyes gave him a sideways glance.

"I thought you were dead for a while there," Kid admitted, seriously.

"Kid..."

"If you hadn't been riding with me..." He didn't meet his friend's gaze.

"Kid, McKenzie was shooting at both of us. We were partners. What affected you affected me."

"Yeah but you were the one losing all the blood."

"I know but Abigail Cole was a very pretty nurse. So some good came of it." Kid smiled at the memory of the doctor's young daughter; his pretty, slim, brown-eyed young daughter. "She had very healing hands," Heyes remembered and Kid laughed.

"Yeah, I bet she did until her father caught you."

"There was nothing improper between me and Abigail."

"Heyes, she had some pretty...distinctive...healing methods if my memory serves correct. I've never had a nurse do to me what I saw..." he stopped, having forgotten that his friend didn't know.

"What you saw?" Heyes looked at him, mouth open in stunned amazement. "Just what did you see?"

"Well I was just looking in to see if you were okay..."

"And?" Two irritated brown eyes met amused blue ones.

"And you looked to be doing okay to me." Kid waited for his friend's reaction. After a moment he smiled. Heyes smiled too, then raised his gun in the air and fired three shots in quick succession.

"It's a bit late to be celebrating," Kid observed.

"It's a signal," Heyes explained and then pointed to a high ridge. Kid looked up, seeing a lone rider on a horse, watching them. Heyes waved and the man waved back. "Now we can ride on safely." Turning his horse, he led the way.

When they finally reached the hideout, Heyes rode in ahead of his friend. Kid's eyes scanned the numerous buildings and the assorted band of men emerging from them. Two men stood watching them from the doorway of the larger cabin, their hands resting on their guns. Another two sat on the corral fence, eyes fixed intently on the two riders. A scruffy young man, in a battered grey hat, strode towards them.

"Heyes!"

"Howdy Kyle," the dark-haired man called back.

"You heard about Jim?" Kyle asked anxiously, before he spat a gloop of tobacco juice on the ground.

"What about him?" Heyes lowered himself down from his horse.

"He's been caught!"

"WHAT?"

"Got arrested in Buffalo Springs."

Shock registered on Heyes' face.

"How d'you know?"

"I was there!" Kyle announced. "I was comin' out of the saloon when I saw it. Jim didn't stand a chance. There was a sheriff and a whole bunch o'men. Came outta nowhere. Jim was just sitting on his horse waiting for us. I tried to help but...well shoot Heyes there was more'n ten of them."

"We have to go get him out." Heyes caught hold of the reins of his horse and turned back to the saddle.

"It's too late."

"What do you mean?"

"They tried him the next day. He's already on his way to prison, Heyes; might even be there by now."

Heyes looked dumbfounded.

"How did they find him?"

"I don't know." Kyle studied his friend's face. "What are we gonna do now?"

"I don't know," Heyes admitted.

"Who's gonna be leader?"

"I don't know that either Kyle." Heyes gave a heavy sigh. Big Jim...captured! It was hard to accept.

Kyle looked up at the other man still sitting on his horse, as if noticing him for the first time. The man hadn't said a word.

"Who's he?" Kyle asked.

"A friend." Heyes stated, vaguely, still stunned by Jim's arrest and incarceration.

"He joinin' us?"

"I don't know." Heyes realised that he had no idea what Kid was going to do. There were a lot of things he didn't know, at that moment, and it was an uncomfortable feeling, for the usually confident young man. Big Jim arrested...how could that be?

"He sick?" The question surprised Heyes and he turned to look at Kid, suddenly seeing him through Kyle's eyes. Sitting on the brown horse, his arms resting on the saddle horn, was a tired, trail-worn, young man with dark circles beneath his eyes. His coat was dirty, his hat battered and dusty, but he was watching the scene, unfolding before him, with an experienced eye. However, Kyle was right, Kid didn't look well.

"He's just been on the trail a long time," Heyes explained. "He's gonna rest up here a while."

"Well we got hot coffee if he wants a cup." Kyle headed into the main cabin as Heyes walked back to his friend.

"You getting down?"

"Am I welcome?"

"Of course you are."

"What happens now?" Heyes looked puzzled. "Now Big Jim's gone?"

"I'm not sure." Heyes looked at the main cabin, wondering what the others would say.

"You okay? I know he was a friend."

"I don't know what I'm feeling." Heyes took a breath. "Come on, Kyle says the coffee's hot."

"Is it better than yours?"

Heyes suppressed a smile.

"Come inside and find out." Heyes headed towards the cabin, pausing in the open doorway, he turned in time to see Kid grimace as he eased himself from the saddle. So he was still hurting.

Several men looked up as Heyes entered the cabin. Taking a mental head count, he realised that not all of the gang were back yet.

"You heard?" Lobo asked, as he got up from one of the bunks.

"Yes," Heyes nodded.

"What are we gonna do?" Lobo scratched his head, then stretched his back muscles.

"Doesn't sound like there's much we can do." Heyes headed towards the stove and the coffee.

"Well someone's gonna hafta be leader," Kyle reminded them.

"Who wants to do it?" Lobo asked. Several men looked at Heyes and then passed him to the stranger in the doorway. Realising the focus of their attention, Heyes did the introductions.

"Gentlemen, this is a friend of mine, Jed Curry." One or two men recognised the name. Heyes stepped towards his friend, showing his support.

"Curry?" Lobo asked. Kid met his gaze. "You Kid Curry?"

"I am," the blond man stated. "Is that a problem?" There was an ominous silence until Lobo replied.

"Not for me. Heck if you're as fast with a gun as they say, you're more than welcome." He smiled and the other men relaxed. Heyes smiled, reassuringly at his friend. He patted Kid on the arm, forgetting his bullet wound and Kid flinched, a move not lost on those around them.

"Let's get you some coffee," Heyes said quickly. Kid followed him to the stove and Heyes poured them each a cup of the hot brew.

"Why don't you rest up for a bit?" Heyes suggested, nodding his head at the bunks, as they sipped their drinks. "The bottom one at the far end isn't taken," Kid's eyes scanned the faces of the other men in the room. Heyes saw his hesitation. "Go on. I'll watch your back this time."

Kid nodded, grateful, and headed towards the bunk. The bed creaked when he sat on it. Several pairs of eyes watched him grimace as he lay down. Kid covered his face with his hat and not long after Heyes noted the steady rise and fall of his friend's chest. Was he asleep? He hoped so. Either way, Kid's hand still lay close to his gun. Heyes suppressed a smile and turned to the rest of the gang. Pulling out a chair at the table he sat down.

"So fellas what are we gonna do?"

At the sound of gunfire, several men, in various states of undress, ran out of the cabin, guns drawn, bleary eyes scanning the surrounding bushes for signs of a posse. Instead, they found Hannibal Heyes sitting casually on a rock as Kid Curry walked towards him. The blond man twirled his gun a couple of times and dropped it back into his holster. Heyes smiled at the Gang.

"Mornin' fellas," he said cheerfully. The men looked confused and not entirely pleased by the early morning wake up call. At least it was early if you'd sat up half the night playing poker, drinking and bragging.

"We heard shootin'," Kyle stated.

"That was just Kid, practicing."

"Fellas," Kid said in greeting, as he approached. There was some mumbling and unneeded guns were returned to their holsters.

"You really as fast as they say?" Lobo asked, noticing a couple of cans lying on the ground behind a far boulder.

"I don't know. How fast am I supposed to be?" Kid asked, leaning against the rock next to Heyes.

"Well sheesh, I heard you woz faster than everyone there is," Kyle told him.

"I'm not sure if that's true," Kid said honestly. "I don't think I've met everyone there is." Heyes suppressed a smile and shot his friend a sideways glance. Kid looked better, more relaxed, this morning. It was amazing what a belly full of Lobo's stew and a goodnight's sleep on a bunk, instead of the hard ground, had done for the blond man's disposition. Despite the raucous laughter and raised voices late into the night, Kid had slept well.

Before anyone could ask for a demonstration of the newcomer's skills, they heard the sound of riders approaching. More of the gang had returned at last, including Deke Stevens, one man Heyes expected to challenge for the leadership.

The men pulled their horses to a halt in front of the cabins. Other members of the gang gathered round them.

"Is it true?" Deke asked as he swung his left leg over the saddle and slid down from the horse. "They've got Big Jim?" He looked at Heyes for confirmation.

"So I'm told," Heyes replied. "Kyle saw it, you'd better ask him."

Deke turned towards Kyle.

"That true?"

"Sure is," Kyle stated, pulling back his shoulders, self-importantly, as he did so. "I saw it all. There was about fifteen of 'em."

"I thought it was ten?" Lobo stated.

"Well there woz a lot. They surrounded Big Jim and marched him off to jail. There was a judge in town and they tried him the next day." He watched as Deke took this in. "He's probably already in prison. We were talkin' about who should be leader now."

Deke shot a look at Heyes.

"Well I reckon it should be me," he stated confidently. Deke was a tall, broad shouldered man, with dark hooded eyes. A thick, dark moustache covered his top lip and his nose had been broken in too many fights. He looked like the brawler he was and everyone knew Deke had a quick temper. He watched Heyes for his reaction. The younger man met his gaze.

"Why you?" Lobo asked and Deke turned to face him.

"Because I know how to command men. I know how to plan a robbery better than Big Jim ever did." He could see he had their attention, if not their faith. "I've got big plans for us. I know a couple of banks we should hit."

Did the rest of the gang really want to follow him, Heyes wondered? He looked at their faces. It was obvious many of the men were afraid of him, but was this what they wanted?

"I want to make this the most feared gang in the west," Deke added.

Kyle looked at Lobo who looked at a man named Butler, who looked at the man standing beside him. None of them knew what to say. Someone had to break the silence.

"Who says we want to be feared?" Heyes asked, flatly. Slowly, Deke faced him.

"I do. You got something to say about that Heyes?" His hand dropped to the gun at his side, and his dark eyes narrowed. Men backed away, recognising an imminent stand off.

"I don't think we need to be the most feared, just the most successful," Heyes told him, not backing away. He remained

leaning against the boulder, not rising to Deke's challenge. "It's not much use people being scared of you if you're still poor."

"Well I say we do and if I'm gonna be leader you're gonna hafta do as I say."

"That assumes the boys want you to be leader." Heyes smiled, innocently. Except the look in his eyes told Deke something different.

"They'll follow me," Deke stated, his hand still at his hip.

"I'm not sure I'd want to follow you," Kid said, stepping forward, his arms folded across his chest.

"Who the hell are you?" the big man demanded, weighing up the young blond man.

"Just someone new here," Kid told him, and no one contradicted him.

"Well in that case you don't get a say."

"I thought all members of the gang would get a say."

"Well you're wrong. You got a problem with that?" Deke's fingers twitched.

"Maybe." Kid unfolded his arms, his eyes fixed on Deke's. The tension between them growing.

"I think we need to let the boys decide, don't you Deke?" Heyes interrupted.

"The boys will back me," Deke stated, confidently, his eyes still fixed on Kid.

"Well let's ask them. Gather round boys, Deke wants to ask you something," Heyes called, waving the men in closer. There was a break in the tension but Kid didn't take his eyes off the tall dark-haired man. Deke flashed the occasional glance in Kid's direction as he watched the men approach.

"Sounds like you want to be leader, Heyes," Deke observed.

"I reckon Heyes'd do a good job," Kyle told him, before he spat a gloop of tobacco juice into the bushes.

"Yeah, I think so too," Lobo agreed, bravely, hoping there was safety in numbers.

"And what does Heyes say to that?" Deke focused on Heyes. "Are you gonna challenge me?"

"For the leadership?" Heyes asked, feigning innocence.

Deke nodded.

"You know Deke, I think I just might. I think the boys deserve someone better." Once again Heyes gave him a pleasant smile, as he met Deke's eyes. His hand never went near his gun.

Deke's eyes narrowed. Heyes looked back at the gang. Deke's hand moved...

An explosion of sound stunned them all. Deke cried out. Still in its holster, his gun skidded across the ground, some distance away. Kid stood to one side, his Colt pointed at Deke. The gang stood watching, open mouthed in astonishment. It was left to Kyle to put into words their feelings of stunned awe at the amazing speed of Kid's draw.

"Ooo wee!" he cried, eloquently.

Heyes looked at Deke and then at Kid. The blond man didn't take his eyes from Stevens.

Kyle looked up at Kid with awe.

"That was fast," he stated.

Heyes was equally impressed. He'd known Kid was fast, he'd seen him draw on the man in the saloon, but he had no idea he was that quick. Finally Kid holstered his Colt, and then looked across at Heyes, who nodded his thanks.

"So men, what are we gonna do?" he asked.

"I vote Heyes for leader," Kyle told them.

"I reckon he'd be okay," Lobo agreed. There was a general nodding of heads. A show of hands was called for and Hannibal Heyes was officially voted the new leader of the Devil's Hole Gang. All the time, Deke Steven's eyes moved venomously between Heyes and the blond gunman. With the decision made, the men agreed it called for a celebration and headed into the cabin.

"You're welcome to stay Deke," Heyes offered. "If you're willing to follow my orders?"

"Nah, I reckon I'll ride out. I didn't know you got yourself a gun dog Heyes." Heyes shot a look at Kid, wondering how he would respond to that. Kid remained impassive. Stevens moved towards his gun, still in its holster.

"Leave it," Kid told him firmly.

Deke looked at Kid. The blond man's thumbs were hooked into his gun belt. Dekes' gun was temptingly close, but he had never seen anyone draw as fast as the man standing impassively before him. Who was he? Saying no more, the dark-haired man headed for his horse and swung himself into the saddle.

"I guess you want to be feared after all," Deke told Heyes, then turning his horse, he rode out. In silence, they watched him go.

"Thanks," Heyes said when Deke had disappeared from view.

"You're welcome." Kid looked back at the trail, thoughtful. "He could be back."

"Yeah, he could."

"Looks like you still need someone to watch your back."

Heyes looked at Kid.

"Yeah, I guess I do." He tried not to sound hopeful. Kid's expression was thoughtful.

"I could stick around for a while, just in case."

"You're staying?" Heyes could not hide his delight.

"I got nothing else to do." Kid looked at Heyes and then he smiled.