



**CHASING
DANGER**

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CHASING DANGER



SARA GRANT

SCHOLASTIC

**TO PAUL. FOR ALL OUR ADVENTURES TOGETHER
AND THE ONES YET TO COME.**





“Don’t leave me here!” I shouted and waved wildly at the seaplane as it floated away with a roar and spray of salty water.

I was standing on a twelve-by-twelve floating dock in the middle of the Indian Ocean. I had survived twenty hours trapped on planes – forty-five minutes of that on a seaplane – and then me and my bags had been abandoned here. My brain and mouth felt fuzzy from recycled air and plastic plane food.

“Come back!” I screamed as the plane cut a wide

arc in the water, preparing to take off again. If it left, I would be stuck here. Nowhere to run. Nowhere to hide. Panic punched me in the gut.

Maybe the pilot couldn't see me. I jumped as high as I could while simultaneously screeching at the top of my lungs. Bad idea. The dock tilted, and I staggered to the edge. I flailed my arms to regain my balance, but I was out of sync with the bobbing dock. My backpack and duffle slid towards me. I had to do something quickly or they'd be tossed into the ocean.

I lunged forward and landed face first on my bags, spreadeagle in the centre of the dock. I'd saved my stuff from a watery grave. Relief flooded through me, but only for the briefest of seconds. I flipped over in time to see the seaplane zoom past and take flight.

"Noooooooooooooooooooooo!" I sprang to my feet. Another bad idea.

The plane's wake rocked the dock. I was catapulted into the air. There was absolutely nothing I could do. I screamed as I plunged butt-

first into the ocean. Big mistake. The sound was strangled by gallons of water splashing over me.

What had my dad told me NEVER to do in an emergency? Oh, yeah – panic.

Too late.

My lungs burned for air. My short, pathetic life flashed before my eyes, but maybe that was only a school of fish because my life wasn't that colourful. I needed to calm down, which wasn't easy when you lacked oxygen and were waging an epic battle with the Indian Ocean.

I clawed my way to the surface and gulped in air. Two strokes and I was back at the dock. Thankfully my luggage had only shifted to the edge and hadn't toppled in. I flopped on the dock and let the hot sun dry my drenched clothes. I combed my fingers through my seaweed-like hair and twisted it in a knot at the back of my head, securing it with the rubber band I always keep around my wrist. I felt a bit wobbly after my almost-sort-of-near-death experience. My fear quickly drained away and was replaced by an all too familiar feeling – annoyance.

All I'd had to do was stand still and wait. I couldn't even do that right.

The sky and ocean merged into an uncomfortable blanket of blue around me. The sun created ripples of liquid diamonds in the water. It was beautiful in a last-man-standing-after-the-apocalypse way. The gentle swaying and the whisper of the waves should have been soothing. Some people might have found the quiet and vast nothingness peaceful, but I couldn't help feeling that I'd made a massive mistake.

When Dad told me about this trip to the Maldives, I was actually excited. He was ex-United States Navy so my life had been a fourteen-year-long boot camp. He'd been recruited for some big assignment at the Pentagon for a month, maybe two. He needed somewhere to dump me. A desert island getaway sounded pretty amazing. While my friends were slaving away in the snowy January cold, I'd be soaking up the sun and exploring the sea. Now standing smack-dab in the middle of nowhere, I knew that I hadn't escaped, only changed prisons.

The sun's rays singed my skin like thousands of searing hot needles. After only five minutes, my clothes were nearly dry. Maybe it was my imagination, but my pasty white skin appeared a shade pinker.

If the heat didn't kill me then I might die of boredom. I had found a crumpled copy of the island's glossy brochure shoved between the seaplane's seat cushions. It boasted – BOASTED – no wifi, TVs or phones. And if that wasn't bad enough, the resort catered exclusively to senior citizens. Dad had left out those two very important details. The most active item on the island's itinerary was water aerobics. I didn't want to think of wrinkly bingo wings flapping about in the pool.

I could deal with heat and boredom, but the thing that was causing the complete and utter meltdown of my internal organs was meeting my British grandma for the first time. I imagined she looked like the Queen of England. I didn't know for sure because I'd never seen a picture of my grandma. Until a month ago, I never knew she existed. I

mean, I knew everyone had a biological mom, and my mom had a mom, but my dad refused to talk about them.

I'd suspected I was adopted, kidnapped, and at one point, cloned. My dad had assured me that he was my father, and I was conceived the old-fashioned way. *Gross!* I'd interrogated, snooped, tricked and begged. He never uttered one syllable about the person who donated her egg nor did I ever find one shred of evidence that she was really real. I had sort of learned to accept my mysterious lack of mom. But today my family tree would expand by one branch whether I liked it or not, and I was freaking out. I couldn't remember why I'd ever wanted to meet the old woman who'd never tried to see me or even send me so much as a birthday text.

I checked my phone. The screen was blank. Water dribbled out of the charging and headphone slots. I stabbed at the buttons and poked at the screen. It was dead. I knew how to perform CPR, but I had no idea how to resuscitate a drenched, lifeless cell

phone. The first casualty of my so-called vacation. I had a feeling it wouldn't be the last.

At least my watch was waterproof. It said it was about six o'clock in the morning, but that was Indiana time. I'd lost two days travelling. There was a nine-hour time difference between Indiana and the Maldives so that would make it three in the afternoon.

I searched for any sign of life. I didn't know if I was being picked up by speedboat or jetpack. Something in the distance was moving towards me.

Was that...?

Nah, don't be ridiculous.

I stood and squinted. Maybe it was the curl of a wave. I stepped closer to the edge. No, that was definitely a fin cutting through the water.

SHARK!

I was a sitting duck on this platform. I imagined the jaws of a Great White chomping me and the dock with one ginormous bite. While I was packing my swimsuit, sunscreen, bug spray and three graphic novels, sharks didn't enter my mind. Sharks

were only in movies and wildlife TV shows. They didn't target fresh US prime-cut kids.

That fin was definitely swimming closer. There was no use calling for help because no one would hear me. I staggered back, tripped on my duffle, and fell hard on my butt. My hands splashed in the water behind me. I scuttled forward. I wasn't going back in what I now knew were shark-infested waters.

I ransacked my duffle for something I could use as a weapon. Could you blind a shark with toothpaste? I didn't have straighteners or a hairdryer or any beauty products that might contain shark-repelling chemicals. If only I was more girly – that way I'd at least have had hairspray, tweezers or stilettos. I dug through my shorts, flip-flops, and a rainbow-collection of T-shirts from bike races and fun runs. I found nothing I could use to defend myself. I was shark bait, plain and simple.

I braced myself as the fin dipped lower and arched closer. This was it. I was going to die and no one would ever know what happened to me. Tomorrow's newspaper headline would read:

Charlotte 'Chase' Armstrong Disappears Without a Trace.

The water erupted in front of me. A sound clawed at my throat until I was all-out horror-movie shrieking.

I stopped mid-scream as my brain told my body what my eyes had actually seen.

The creature burst from the water again and I got a better look.

A dolphin.

My fear melted like a vanilla-chocolate twist in the August heat of the State Fair. I'd never heard of death by dolphin. I was such an idiot. I laughed as three dolphins jumped and twisted giving me my very own SeaWorld show. As they raced away, I repacked my duffle. My dad would be so disappointed. He'd raised me to take care of myself, and I'd freaked at a dolphin swim-by. Dad had made me practise fire drills and obstacle courses. He showed me aikido so I could manoeuvre out of any chokehold or defend against a backpack thief. He never told me what to do in case of a shark attack. In

his defence, we lived in Indiana where the chances of seeing a shark – outside of an aquarium – were less than zero.

I found my sunglasses at the bottom of my backpack and slipped them on. Between the scratches on the lenses and the waves, I thought I saw a boat heading towards me. I should have felt relieved. I wasn't going to drown or die by shark attack, or shrivel under the baking sun, or simply be left to suffer starvation and dehydration. But I couldn't shake the feeling that this vacation might actually kill me.