



CHAPTER 17

Shark!

The water slide was both high and long. It was formed of different multi-coloured lanes of undulating plastic, and was completely open to the air, unlike the tube ones I'd been down in swimming pools. I grinned as I watched kids plunging down it, slipping and sliding, zooming like bullets, until they were safely delivered into the shallow splash pool at the bottom. No word of a lie, it looked *epic*. We definitely needed one of these in our pool project idea!

Mr Chicago eyed the waterslide suspiciously. "It's much bigger than I thought!" He looked at Mrs Chicago, who nodded.

“No,” Brad said.

“I didn’t say anything,” Mrs Chicago replied.

“But I know what you’re thinking!” Brad said.

“Please, *no*.”

“It’s just a precaution!” his dad said. “Safety first!”

Brad got down on his knees. “Please!”

Mr Chicago shook his head and pulled a bowling-ball style crash helmet out of his rucksack. “Either you wear this, or you’re not going on it. What if there’s an accident?”

Brad’s bottom lip started to wobble.

I turned to Mr Chicago. This had to be the best idea *ever*. No one knew better than me that accidents *do* happen. They happen all the time! Wearing a crash helmet seemed like an excellent way to avert disaster. “Have you got a spare one I could use?” I asked.

Mr Chicago smiled. “Of course!” He pulled a second bowling-ball helmet from his bag.

I took it from him. “Amazing. I would feel a lot safer with this on.” I glanced at Brad, who was looking at me with his mouth hanging open. “What? You can’t be too careful, Brad. What if we crashed and split our heads

open and all our brains came out?”

“Oh, my!” Mrs Chicago muttered. “Could that really happen?”

“Maybe!” I said. I handed Brad the other helmet.

Brad chewed his lip a bit. “Well, I guess if you’re wearing one too,” he said. “A humiliation shared is a humiliation halved, isn’t that the saying?” He took the helmet and plonked it on his head. Actually, Brad’s helmet was pretty cool, since, like everything else he owned, it was monogrammed with a “B” and even had “go faster” stripes on it. My helmet also had some letters on it, which I didn’t mind, even if they were inaccurate:



“That’s my sister’s old helmet,” Brad said.

“I like it,” I replied. “It suits me.”

Brad nodded. “It really does.”

Mrs Chicago paid for our tokens, and me and Brad started the long climb towards the top of the slide, made longer by me having to stop every few minutes to pull up the neon-green swimming shorts I’d borrowed, since the elastic was pretty loose around the waist. I knew the waterslide was high, but I didn’t realize just how high until we were standing on the platform at the very top. My stomach did a flip as I glanced over the edge and looked down on all the small people at the bottom – including Brad’s parents, who were waving at us, and the crowd of spectators by the splash pool (mainly parents filming their kids coming down the slide on their phones). There was a little commotion as someone’s dog jumped into the splash pool and ran through the water, barking in delight, before his owner pulled him out, and everyone laughed and cheered. Everyone seemed to be having a good time – everyone except me. This suddenly felt like a kamikaze mission. Why would someone with my history of bad luck willingly throw themselves down a water slide, even wearing a crash helmet? I swallowed, my stomach a total mess of knots. And then Brad put his

arm across my shoulder...

"We'll do it together, buddy. It's always easier together."

I looked up at Brad and grinned. Then I stood at the top of the red lane, with Brad next to me at the top of the blue lane, and took a deep breath.

"On three!" Brad said. "One..."

I exhaled.

"Two..."

And Brad jumped. "THREE!"

"I thought you said after three?" I shouted.

"On three, not *after*..." His voice trailed off as he disappeared down the slide at alarming speed.

I swallowed. *Great*. Now I had to face this on my own.

KEOW! KEOW! KEOW!

I knew that sound anywhere. "Ohhhhhh, nooooooooo!" I babbled, looking over my shoulder to where The Seagull of Doom was fast approaching, its missiles locked on me, flying in a V formation with a gang of his mates. I lurched forward as they dive-bombed me, throwing myself off-balance, before catapulting head-first down the slide.

“WAAAAAAAAAAAAA!” I wailed, as I accelerated, the world rushing past me, arms outstretched, water splashing in my face and down my nose. “NOOOOOOOOOOOO!”

I couldn’t stop, I had reached what I think they call “terminal velocity” – the maximum speed attained by an object as it falls – well, anyway, this was no time for a science lesson. I was like a bullet, a runaway train, an out-of-control aircraft, hurtling towards some terrible ending.

I flew off the end of the slide and skidded across the splash pool, coming to a screeching halt as I smashed into the soft wall at the side. Horrendous. But I was safe. I’d made it...

I looked around. Some people were laughing.

I did a little wave.

Wait, why were they laughing *and* pointing?

I saw Mr Chicago gesturing urgently towards something floating further up the splash pool. It looked like a pair of swimming shorts. A pair of neon-green swimming shorts which looked *very* familiar.

I suddenly became aware of how chilly it felt, below my waist.

No.

Please, no.

I tentatively glanced down.

I WASN'T WEARING ANY SHORTS!

THE SHORTS HAD COME OFF!

I HAD LOST MY SWIMMING SHORTS ON THE
WAY DOWN!

“NOOOOOOOOOO!” I screamed.

And there I was, flapping about in the splash pool, entirely naked, when the dog from earlier leaped back in, splashed through the water, retrieved my shorts in his mouth ... then leaped back out and ran away with them.

“GAAAAH!” I squealed. “Now what?”

Well, I had to get the shorts back – *that's what!* I removed my helmet and used it to maintain what was left of my dignity. I scrambled out of the splash pool where I encountered the dog's owner, who was trying to get his dog back



(not very effectively, if you ask me). “Come back! Here, boy!” he was shouting.

The dog was hightailing it towards the beach.

“What’s his name?” I gasped.

“Shark, but—”

I pelted down towards the beach, still using the helmet to hide my bits, streaked on to the sand and yelled.

“SHARK!” I cried. “SHARK! SHARK!”

What was really nice is that other people on the beach immediately started helping me. “SHARK!” they shouted. “SHARK! SHARK!”

Pretty soon loads of people were calling for Shark, but it was annoying because loads of other people began screaming and running out of the water, and pretty soon after that there was a stampede of hysterical folk heading off the beach and scrambling up to the road. It was then I realized that I’d just run on to a beach and screamed, “SHARK!” and maybe people didn’t know that Shark was a dog and not an actual ... um ... *shark*.

However, it was too late now. I stood, motionless, as crazed men and women, mothers carrying crying



heard the commotion, and took too sharp a turn, the giant banana scraped along some rocks, and then POPPED and sank, leaving its five passengers bobbing around in the water screaming, “HELP! HELP US!”

