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BRECE
THOMSON

#17: South Carolina Sea Creatures

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Okay. The first thing you need to know about this story is that I'm not trying to scare you away from South Carolina. I've lived here my whole life, and my family vacations all over the state. We go camping at Lake Wateree, fishing at Lake Thurmond, and hiking at Hunters Island Nature Preserve.

And when it comes down to it, there really isn't anything to be afraid of. South Carolina has some alligators, which most states don't have. We also have a few poisonous snakes. Lots of states have those, and if you use a little common sense, the snakes won't bother you. There are sharks in the ocean, but I've

never seen one, and I don't worry about them when I swim.

But what happened to me this past summer was different. It had nothing to do with snakes or alligators. True, what happened to me happened at the ocean, but it had nothing to do with sharks.

It had to do with *sea creatures*.

Hideous, ugly, gigantic creatures that no one had ever seen before.

But before I tell you about what happened *this* summer, it's important that you know something about what we went through *last* summer.

My name is Chad Prescott, and I live in Charleston, South Carolina. I'm twelve, and I have a sister named Michelle. She's ten, and while she can often be a real pain, most of the time she's pretty cool. She and I have the exact same color hair—brown—except hers is a lot longer than mine. She wears it in a ponytail a lot, especially when we're on vacation.

Which was where we were last summer when all of us—Mom, Dad, Michelle and I—had a horrifying experience.

We were vacationing at a place called Hilton Head Island. It's a famous place, and lots of people go there to golf, which is why we were at Hilton Head.

Michelle and I don't golf, but Mom and Dad love the sport.

On this particular day, we had gone to the beach to swim in the ocean. The day was really warm, and the white beach sand was so hot that it stung my feet. Mom and Dad stayed on beach towels beneath a big blue and white umbrella, while Michelle and I went swimming . . . just like we always did when we spent a day at the beach.

And that's when something really scary happened.

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I remember splashing around in the shallow water. We had met some new friends, but I don't remember their names.

What I do remember is what they were telling us about the Hilton Head Water Monster.

"He's big and green and he swallows people in one gulp," one of the kids was saying as we stood in the shallow water. The cool surf licked at my knees. Seagulls wheeled above, like white kites beneath a blue sky.

"There's no such thing," I said, shaking my head. But Michelle was falling for it.

"Really?" she asked.

“Yep,” another kid said, nodding. “It’s true. I’ve seen it before.”

I shook my head. “I don’t believe you,” I said.

“Believe what you want,” the kid replied. “I’m telling you: ask around. Lots of people have seen the monster. He waits until you’re not paying attention. You might be swimming, even in shallow water. You won’t see the monster until it’s too late.”

“And then what?” Michelle asked. Her blue eyes were bulging like marbles.

“And then it grabs you,” the kid said, “and pulls you under. One gulp, and you’re gone.”

Michelle looked positively horrified, and I didn’t think it was very nice of the kids to be scaring her that way.

But they kept at it. I think they saw how frightened Michelle was, and they knew that she believed their story.

After they left, Michelle stared out at the waves rolling in. She looked worried.

“They were only trying to scare you,” I told her. “There’s no such thing as the Hilton Head Water Monster.”

“But what if there is?” she replied.

“There just *isn’t*,” I said.

“But how do you know, Chad? It could be out there right now, just waiting.”

“Look out there,” I said. “Lots of people are swimming and having fun. Do you think they’re worried about some silly water monster?”

“Maybe they don’t know about it,” she said.

“For gosh sakes,” I said, wading into deeper water. “Come on.” I turned and reached out my hand. Reluctantly, Michelle took it, and we waded out into the water.

“Those kids were just being mean,” I said. “There’s nothing out here. You’ll see.”

Soon, the water was up over our waists. A wave washed up and almost knocked us over, and Michelle spluttered and giggled.

“See?” I said, with my best *big-brother-knows-best* voice. “Nothing to worry about at all.”

As soon as I uttered those words, a dark shape appeared in the water before us. It was big and wide, but the form was too dark to make out what it was. But I knew one thing:

It was moving *fast*.

Michelle screamed, but it was already too late. The enormous beast was already upon us.

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I think that if I had the time, I would have screamed, just like Michelle had done. But the creature was moving too fast, and in the next instant I was knocked beneath the surface. Salt water filled my mouth, burned my nostrils, and stung my eyes.

But I still had Michelle's hand, and I wasn't going to let go. I held tight with all my strength as bubbles whirled about. My foot found the soft, sandy bottom and I broke the surface. I pulled Michelle to her feet. She was coughing and choking, and then she started to cry. My head snapped around, searching the water, ready to face the awful creature that was after us.

But it was gone.

“Come on!” I said urgently, leading my sister to shallow water. “Let’s get out and go tell Mom and Dad!”

All around us, there were people splashing and having fun. No one else had spotted the gigantic creature . . . yet.

But I knew it was only a matter of time.

We couldn’t get out of the water fast enough. When the waves were beneath our knees, we started to run. Michelle had stopped crying, but I knew that she was still scared, so I didn’t let go of her hand.

When we reached the shore, we ran across the hot sand to where Mom and Dad were sitting.

“Mom! Dad!” I exclaimed. “There’s something in the water!”

“A monster!” Michelle said. She turned and pointed out to sea. “It was after us! It really was!”

Mom and Dad looked concerned. They stood up and raised their hands to their foreheads to shield their eyes from the harsh midday sun.

“Right out there,” I said, pointing.

“It’s the Hilton Head Water Monster,” Michelle said. “We met some kids that told us that the Hilton Head Water Monster can swallow you up in one gulp!”

Dad lowered his hand and looked at Michelle. “There is no such thing as the Hilton Head Water Monster,” he said. “They were only trying to fool you.”

“But there’s something out there,” Michelle protested.

“Michelle’s right,” I said. “Something big knocked us over.”

“It was probably just a wave,” Mom said. She sat down on her beach towel.

“I’m going to go to the snack bar,” Dad said. “Anybody want anything?”

I was about to tell him that I wanted some lemonade, but the words never left my lips. I was interrupted by a loud commotion in the water.

Screaming.

And shouting.

The day was hot, but a cold chill raced down my spine as I realized that there was something in the sea, after all. Michelle and I had been lucky. We had escaped.

But as we stood watching the disturbance in the water, I knew that other people weren’t going to be so fortunate.

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People began running to the waters' edge to see what was going on. Even Mom stood up again, and she and Dad stared out into the sea. I wondered what was going on, and how many people had been hurt . . . or worse.

Soon, however, we found out the truth.

"It's a sea turtle!" somebody shouted. *"Get the camera!"*

A sea turtle?!?! I thought. I had never seen one before, except on television.

Mom, Dad, Michelle, and I walked to the shore. A bunch of people had gathered in waist-deep water. We waded in, and we could see the dark form of the

turtle beneath the surface. Nobody got close to it, though, and the turtle just swam around for a few more moments before heading out to deeper water.

“That was your water monster,” Dad said. “A sea turtle. You probably scared it more than it scared you.”

In a way, I was relieved. If I hadn’t known that it was a turtle, I would probably still believe that there was some monster in the waters off Hilton Head Island.

But remember: this is what happened to us last summer. *This* summer was going to be different.

A lot different.

This summer, we found out that sea creatures really *do* exist. And I’m not talking about the normal creatures that you would usually find in the ocean. I’m talking about giant beasts from the darkest depths of the Atlantic . . . and it all started on a cloudy, rainy day on the Isle of Palms.

The Isle of Palms is another popular place in South Carolina. As islands go, it’s not far from the mainland at all. Dad and Mom have some friends who have a guest house, and they invited us to stay for two whole weeks!

I couldn’t wait. I had never been to the Isle of Palms before, but I had heard that it was really cool.

We planned to go to the beach a lot, and take a chartered nature cruise.

The first day of vacation was rainy and gray. Mom and Dad were bummed because they wanted to play golf. I was bummed because Michelle and I were going to go fishing in a small wooden rowboat. Dad and Mom had said that they would allow us to use the boat as long as we wore life vests and didn't get too far from shore.

But the rain ended around noon, and Mom and Dad said we could go. It was still too wet for them to go golfing, so they decided that they would just hang out or go for a walk.

Michelle and I loaded up our fishing poles and tackle boxes. I'm not a very good fisherman, and I usually don't catch many fish, but I have a lot of fun, anyway. So does Michelle.

"I can't believe Mom and Dad are letting us go out alone," Michelle said as she slipped into her life vest.

"Well, I *am* twelve, you know," I said. "I'm old enough to take care of myself. And you, too."

"I can take care of myself," Michelle said as we pushed the wooden rowboat into the water.

"Jump in," I said. Michelle swung her leg up and got into the boat, taking the front seat. I pushed the boat out a little farther. When the water was almost to

my knees, I climbed in and took my place in the back of the boat and slipped into my life vest, buckling it around my waist. Then I grasped the oars and dipped the blades into the water.

“Maybe we’ll see another sea turtle like last year,” Michelle said as she leaned over the side of the boat and peered into the water.

“Maybe,” I said. “But I’d rather catch a fish.”

But deep down, I knew that we probably wouldn’t catch fish. Salt water fishing is a lot different than fresh water fishing. We didn’t even have the right equipment for salt water fishing—but I didn’t mind. I was just happy to be on vacation.

I rowed the boat out until the water was about four feet deep. Then I let the oars dangle in the water from the oar locks, picked up my fishing pole, and gave it a cast. Michelle was too busy looking down into the water to care about fishing.

“I can see fish right below me,” she said. “Maybe you should fish here.”

“Those are just little ones,” I said. “I want to catch bigger ones than that.”

I wouldn’t have to wait long. It would only be a few more casts before I had my first fish on the line.

At least, I *thought* it was a fish.

But that's not what it turned out to be . . . and that's how the first day of our two week vacation turned into a nightmare.

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