

Summer at Gridlock Camp



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Chapter-1

Summer vacation had just started, and Charlotte was coming back from skating class one evening. She knocked on the door and shouted, "Open up". Charlotte was a mean, spiteful, hot-tempered girl. Her rude tone was at odds with the innocence one expects from an eleven-year-old. And thanks to her sharp tongue, she had very few friends. As she entered the room her parents looked at her. "Why are looking at me like that?" said Charlotte; and stomped up to her room. Her parents said nothing. She felt strange, her parents never behaved like that. They were muttering to each other while making food. After some time, they sat down for dinner. Spring rolls, rice and mashed potato soup were served on the dining table.

For a while, nobody talked. Then Mrs. Jones broke the silence and said "Charlotte, your father and I want to tell you something". "What?" replied Charlotte. "We were thinking to send you to summer camp this year, what do you say?" asked Mr. Jones. "How could you think of that, you know I don't like to spend my time on things like that" retorted Charlotte, in her usual high-pitched tone. "Well, we have already talked to the administrator over there, and he is delighted to let you join" said Mrs. Jones. Charlotte's face became red with anger.



She started yelling about how she would rather spend her holidays at home. Charlotte was never excited about joining any camp. She did not enjoy the outdoor activities and found it difficult to make new friends. Moreover, all the camps had a strict set of rules to follow.

Rules that she hated and did not want to comply with. But this time around, her parents were in no mood to relent. So, it was set - Charlotte would attend the weeklong Gridlock Summer Camp.

The camp was to start the week after next. It was a popular camp for kids of age 10-13 years; and children from neighboring states attended this camp as well. While it seemed that Charlotte had given in to her parent's request; in reality, she had a devious plan in her mind. She had decided that she would behave poorly at the summer camp; so badly that the camp administrators would cut her camp short and send her back home. She had a lot of confidence in her plan and was sure it would work.

It was the night before the start of summer camp. Charlotte was packing things as per the instructions that were mailed out. She packed 3 pairs of clothes, sunscreen, sleeping bag, couple of water bottles and nuts/cookies to munch on the way. Her mother slipped in some cash, in case there was an emergency. The packing was done. She went to bed; thinking about the camp and her plan.

Chapter-2

It was a bright sunny morning. Charlotte lay awake on her bed thinking about summer camp. She got dressed, and rushed down to the hall to eat breakfast. Her parents were already there. She had an omelette for breakfast. She took her bag and waited at doorstep for the bus. After some time, she heard a honk; and walked up to the bus. She stepped inside, took the last seat and the bus left. All other kids were about her age. Charlotte stretched her legs on each side of the seat, trying to be mean. The other children did not like that, as they were very friendly to each other. On the way, Charlie, the supervisor said, "we will reach the summer camp by noon". All children yelled in delight; all except Charlotte, of course. Finally, the bus arrived at the camp.



The kids got down and started looking around the place. The camp had a lake for boating, couple of hiking trails, ziplining for adventure lovers and an open ground to put up tents. There was also a stable, if the kids wanted to try out horse riding. Different activities had been mapped out for each day. After a few minutes Charlie said "Everybody, please go to your cabins. If you need any help finding them, please ask Emily, Zoe or Max". Emily, Zoe and Max were Charlie's co-workers. Their uniforms were grey shirts and pants. Charlotte looked around and spotted a tall young woman with a long ponytail. As she turned around, Charlotte saw her badge. The badge had her name in big bold letters -

ZOE WALLACE

Charlotte went forward pushing all the children behind. In front of her stood Zoe. "Where is my cabin?" asked Charlotte. "Hi, I am..... "I already know your name, continue" interrupted Charlotte in a rude voice". Zoe gulped. "Ok, then what is your name and where are you from?" asked Zoe. "I am Charlotte and I am from New York" replied Charlotte. Zoe ran down the list. The list was made in an alphabetically order of the states they were living in. Charlotte's name was somewhere in the middle. "Your cabin number is 56. Go straight, first right and then the second left. "Ok" said Charlotte, walking towards her cabin. She opened her cabin door. There was a bunk bed, which meant that she had to share the cabin with another kid. Just then, a girl walked in. "Hi, I am Olivia" she said. Olivia was short, had two ponytails and blue eyes. Charlotte looked very big and tall compared to Olivia. "You are my cabin mate?" Charlotte asked with raised eyebrows. "That's right, we are going to be together for a week" Olivia replied in excitement. The dismay on Charlotte's face made it clear that she did not like Olivia's company. That night Charlotte kept thinking about her plan of behaving nasty so that she gets kicked out of the camp.

Chapter-3

The alarm rang at 7:00am. Charlotte groaned as she woke up. She stretched her arms; and put on her slippers. Bright sunlight came through the windows. Charlotte got up; and opened one of the windows to let some fresh air come in. Since the camp in a forest, she could even hear the birds chirping. She had a quick shower; and stepped outside to have her breakfast. Outside the breakfast area, was a board with a list of activities planned for the day.

Activities for Today- Talent Show & Boating

She cracked her knuckles. When Charlotte cracked her knuckles, it meant that she had got an idea to trouble somebody.

Charlie blew the whistle, and everybody lined up. "Today's activities are Talent Show and Boating. For Talent Show, you can do whatever you please; including dancing and singing." said Charlie on the mike. All the children started murmuring. "Okay, then let's get started. We will do Talent Show first" he said. Jinn was the first one to go. Jinn Yong was from Japan. She sang beautifully. Even mean Charlotte applauded.



Few more children came after Jinn. The next item on the agenda was boating. Everybody wore lifejackets; and started getting onto the boats lined up on the lake. Charlotte observed that Mia was tentative; perhaps a little afraid of water. And she decided to have some fun at her expense. As Mia was trying to get onto the boat, she pushed her; resulting in Mia falling into the lake.

Others around started laughing; and mocked at Mia's clumsiness. Since Mia had a life jacket ON, she could come back up on the boat. But she was clearly frightened; and taken aback by Charlotte's act. As she walked back to her cabin to change her clothes, she cursed Charlotte.

Charlie had seen what Charlotte had done. He took her aside and had a quiet word with her; warning her to behave or else. Charlotte did not mind; in fact, this is exactly what she wanted. Her plan seemed to be working out. Couple of more tricks and she will be on her way back home, she thought.

The boating activity ended without any more drama. Everybody went for lunch. Word of what happened to Mia had gotten around. Since Mia had attended this camp in previous years as well, many campers knew her well; and were angry with Charlotte. Charlie stood at a distance and was observing the lunch crowd.

He could figure out what everyone was talking about. While he had seen several characters in his ten-year association with Gridlock camp, Charlotte seemed a tough nut to crack.

That night, a campfire had been organized. Max was sitting around the fire, playing a guitar. A few were dancing to the tune; while some others were sitting close by and singing along with Max. Charlie had brought in marshmallows to add to the campfire mood.

Charlotte joined the group and sat beside Olivia. While everybody was having a good time, Charlotte took out the gum she was chewing, and stuck it quietly in

Olivia's hair. For some time, Olivia did not have any clue about it. But when she ran her fingers through her hair, she felt something sticky. She immediately realized what the problem was and burst into tears. Olivia loved her hair; and she knew that to get rid of the gum, she will need to cut some of her curls. Though Charlotte never admitted, everybody was sure that this was her prank.

Charlie had had enough of this. "This is not fun. You can play tricks which are harmless. But such pranks are unacceptable" said Charlie, his face red with anger. "You are being grounded, and will not attend any activities tomorrow, announced Charlie and walked away in a huff.

Chapter-4

The next day, Charlotte stayed all day in the cabin. And while this was supposed to be a punishment, she did not seem to mind it. After all, her goal was to get evicted from the camp. She knew that Charlie was now at a breaking point. So, one more prank from her end, and Charlie would surely ask her to leave.

Her mind was occupied in these thoughts; when she suddenly heard a sound. At first, it seemed to be coming from a distance. But then it grew louder. Charlotte got nervous. She looked out from the window; and saw some movement behind the bushes.



Now, she got worried. Being alone in the cabin, she did not know how to react. She decided to step out and run towards the common area; where she would feel safer. Just as she stepped outside, she saw a large shadow in front of her. She could hear big, heavy steps; as if the whole ground was shaking. She looked behind and screamed "BEAR, BEAR". But there was no one around. Scared for her life, she started running. In her haste, she stumbled and fell flat with her face on the ground. Now the bear was right above her. She could even smell the bear's breath. She feared the worst now; and started praying. Suddenly, from nowhere, she heard somebody fighting with the bear. It was a girl's shadow; a girl with two ponytails. It was OLIVIA. Soon enough, she heard more girls screaming for help. Charlie and Zoe came out. They shot a bullet with anesthesia and the bear fell on the floor, unconscious. Charlotte had been saved. She got up from the ground and thanked everybody including Olivia.

Charlotte went back to her cabin and quietly slept. The next day morning, she woke up early. She decided to walk down the forest and watch the sunrise. As she walked, she could not help but think of the events that had occurred in the last couple of days. The brat she had been, the pranks she had played on others, the not-so-nice things she had said about others. And how, in spite of all this, her fellow mates at the camp had continued to be friends with her and even put themselves in danger in order to save her. The same Olivia that she had mocked did not give it a second thought before jumping in to save Charlotte.

Charlie was critical of Charlotte's behavior, but the moment he heard her cries for help; he grabbed his gun and ran outside his office. Throughout yesterday evening, fellow campers had come to check on her. It was now clear to her. She needed to change herself. She realized she needed to make an effort to enjoy her camp; and appreciate what others are doing for her.

As she returned to the camp, she smiled and waved to her fellow campers. It is amazing how even such small things can make a difference. The fellow campers smiled back at her. Some even walked up to her and hugged her. Her eyes became moist. She felt ashamed of her earlier acts. And in that moment, she decided to walk up to Mia and Olivia; and apologize to them.

The camp had ended. Parents of all the kids were at the camp site to pick up their children. Mr. and Mrs. Jones looked around anxiously. To their surprise, Charlotte walked up to them with a spring in her steps and a big, wide smile. "Are you ok?" they asked. "Oh, I am fine, Mom. I loved it here. And thank you for registering me to this camp". Mrs. Jones was pleasantly surprised and wondered if she meant this for real. She struggled to respond. "Ummm....." is all that she could mutter. Charlotte intervened and said "I have changed, Mom. I have changed for the better!".

The End

About the Author



Tanvi is a 9-year-old studying in Fourth Grade at NPS Koramangala. She likes to paint, do origami and occasionally tries her hand at baking. She is a self-driven, self-disciplined girl always ready to take on challenges. Just like any girl her age she dreams of spending her summer at a summer camp filled with lots of exciting activities, with her friends and no parents around to bother them with dos and don'ts. This book to some extent, expresses this dream of hers.

Blurb

Eleven-year-olds are bubbly, chirpy and full of enthusiasm. At this young age, everybody is your friend and you would not miss a single opportunity to be with them. But Charlotte is different - a little strange. She seems miserable, has hardly any friends and is always looking to ways to make others angry and upset. Forced to attend a summer camp by her parents, she refuses to mend her ways and continues with her selfish behaviour - until ONE DAY, a chance incident changes her thinking and perspective.

Read the story to understand more of Charlotte and how she ends up changing herself!