

THE STILLNESS IN THE WATER

Written by

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FADE IN:

FLASHBACK - COAST OF CAPE PENINSULA - DAY

A 28 foot white Skipjack boat skims powerfully through the water.

At the controls is the sole occupant, PETER. He is in his mid-fifties, lean. He steers the craft effortlessly, seems at home in this oceanic setting.

His eyes scan the distant horizon.

PETER (V.O.)

I can see now why your mother asked me to have a word with you.

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Peter is sat at the dining room table. Sat squirming opposite is HOLDEN (11) dark hair, sweet face. He tries to play it cool but struggles to maintain any composure.

Peter pushes a chunky old laptop to one side. His gives Holden his best 'stern look'.

PETER

Powerful stuff there Holden, you definitely have the family trait for writing.

HOLDEN

I was angry and Chris started it and it was only a stupid story anyway. I didn't mean it.

PETER

You may not have meant it, but words are the most powerful weapon in the world.

HOLDEN

No they're not, nuclear weapons are!

The stern faces softens into a smile.

PETER

You got me there nephew, but words can have more of an impact than you imagine, especially with the internet becoming so popular.

(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)

What you write here today can be read by anyone with a modem, anywhere in the world.

Holden shrugs his shoulders; whatever!

PETER (CONT'D)

Did you know I wrote a book once?

HOLDEN

Really?

PETER

Scouts honour. It was about a great white shark terrorizing a Long Island Resort.

Holden sits up, intrigued.

HOLDEN

Oh wow, cool!

PETER

I thought so too. But the book became popular, real popular. Soon people started to become afraid. My story cemented a perception in the minds of many people that sharks were stalking, killing machines that needed to be destroyed.

HOLDEN

But they are scary, that big one in Finding Nemo; I don't like him.

PETER

That's the problem, we fear what we don't understand and my book enforced that fear. Dozens of shark fishing tournaments popped up along the East Coast of the US alone. It was remorseless. Since then, populations of many species of sharks have dropped by 50 percent. How much of that was due to the words I wrote all those years ago?

HOLDEN

Can you not, like, write another book to fix it?

PETER

Words have a tendency to evolve and form a life of their own.

(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)

By the time I realized the impact,
the story had spawned sequels, spin-
offs and spread around the world;
the damage was done.

HOLDEN

That sucks.

Peter looks off into the distance.

PETER

It did. But you know what?

HOLDEN

What?

PETER

That's not the end of the story.

FLASHBACK - COAST OF CAPE PENINSULA

A flick of a switch and the twin outboard motors splutter to
a stop.

Peter stands on the Deck, surveys the surrounding waters.
There's no other vessels in sight.

Stood next to him, figuratively speaking, is Holden.

PETER

The best place to spot Great White
Sharks is False Bay around the Cape
Peninsula. Do you know where that
is?

Holden rolls his eyes.

HOLDEN

South Africa.

PETER

Excellent!

HOLDEN

Why did you go out there?

Peter opens a crate to reveal the carcasses of fish packed in
ice; shark bait.

PETER

I don't know, I was just following
some instinct.

He slings the bloody remains of a fish overboard.

PETER (CONT'D)

I had to do something, I felt so guilty. In so many ways we are nourished by the sea, the ways our lives benefit materially as well as spiritually are nearly infinite. And we are well on our way to ruining it all. What madness is this, what suicidal folly?

Another batch of shark bait follows the first. He pauses, looks Holden straight in the eye.

PETER (CONT'D)

One author writing one story with no ill intentions and yet I ask myself all the time, how much of this did I influence?

Peter scoops up more bait, throws it into the sea. SUDDENLY the head of a Great White Shark rises out of the depths and chomps down on the bloody offerings.

Shocked, Peter scrambles back. He trips, falls sharply on his behind.

Wow!

HOLDEN

Wow!

PETER

Peter rises to his feet. He cautiously approaches the side of the boat. He addresses the ocean.

PETER (CONT'D)

Oh great spirit of the seas, please accept my profound apologies. I never intended my words to cause so much carnage.

HOLDEN

Seriously? Please tell me you did not say that?

PETER

(at Holden)

To be honest I've no idea what I said next. Have a look and you'll see why.

Holden walks slowly to the side of the boat. He peeks over and GASPS.

Revealed is something miraculous, yet terrifying. The waters surrounding the boat for as far as the eye can see are filled with shark fins.

They all circle the boat in a clockwise rotation.

Peter joins Holden. They stare out at the spectacle before them.

PETER (CONT'D)

The only thing I could think of at that moment was why didn't I hire a bigger boat?

Peter laughs at his remark which is completely lost on Holden.

HOLDEN

Did they attack?

PETER

I thought they would but they just circled for a long time. Some of them rose to the surface, some of them twisted and splashed around. I was mesmerized, none of it felt real. I don't know how long I witnessed this amazing display really. I lost track of time and then suddenly...

He taps Holden on the shoulder, points towards the deck.

HOLDEN

What?

PETER

I got distracted for a second.

HOLDEN

And?

PETER

And I could sense it.

HOLDEN

What?

PETER

The stillness in the water.

They both look back at the sea. The water is calm, still. There's no sign of any sharks.

HOLDEN

Where did they all go?

They lean out and search for any sign of the sharks.

SUDDENLY the boat is struck by a powerful force. It tips sideways violently.

They both tumble into the sea.

Peter is the first to burst through the surface. He coughs up a mouthful of water.

He turns around to find Holden treading water casually.

HOLDEN (CONT'D)

Did you make it back on the boat?

Peter glances at the boat.

PETER

No, I knew it was too late. It was like I could here the 'baa-dum' music in my head.

HOLDEN

The what?

PETER

Your mother will let you watch it when you are a bit older, you'll know what I mean but basically I knew what was coming.

Peter turns away from Holden and the boat.

A shark fin, noticeably larger than the previous ones rises out of the depths like an emerging submarine about 50 feet directly in front of them.

It glides slowly in their direction.

HOLDEN

This is intense!

PETER

Strangely enough I wasn't scared. It felt like natural justice, karma served up on a plate and I was the main course.

The fin stops about 10 feet in front of them.

HOLDEN

Hey, I didn't think sharks could stop? I thought they swam forever or something.

PETER

Neither did I. But it did. And it seemed to be waiting for something. So I went down to see what it wanted.

Peter takes a deep breath and slips beneath the surface. Holden takes a breath of his own and descends..

EXT. UNDER THE OCEAN

Into gin-clear water.

Peter floats before the awesome majesty of an enormous Great White Shark.

The pointed snout, the underslung mouth, the black eyes, the torpedo shape of the gunmetal gray body; this shark is easily 25 feet long.

Both Man and Man-Eater stare at each other for a few timeless seconds.

SUDDENLY - The great white wheels around, voids its bowels, and swims frantically away in a nasty brown cloud.

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. DINING ROOM

Holden's jaws are dangling open in shock.

HOLDEN

Are you saying it crapped all over
you and just swam off?

Peter squirms uncomfortably.

PETER

Something like that yes. But don't
let your mother hear you say
language like that.

Holden bursts into laughter. It is infectious, Peter joins in.

The laughter finally subsides.

PETER (CONT'D)

The point is, the most fearsome
predator on earth, the largest
carnivorous fish in the sea didn't
eat me. I began to wonder if I
hadn't been visited by some spirit
of the ocean after all.

HOLDEN

For what reason?

PETER

My death would serve no purpose, in
fact the irony may had lead to more
sharks being killed.

(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)

But no, if I challenged all accepted facts about sharks, if I dedicated my life to protecting the oceans maybe I could make up in some way for what I had done. So that's what I did and will continue to do so until my last dying breath. But do you know what?

Peter grips Holden by the arm.

PETER (CONT'D)

If I knew back then what I know now I couldn't in all conscious write that book. But I did, I can't take it back. Do you understand?

He stares at Holden intently. Holden nods.

HOLDEN

I do sir, yes.

PETER

As authors we have a great responsibility. There are enough monsters out there without us inventing more.

HOLDEN

I'm sorry. I'll write a different story, one you and mom will be proud of!

Peter releases his grip and smiles. They both rise. Peter hugs his nephew.

PETER

You're a good kid. Now go and do your chores.

Holden walks towards the door. He turns.

HOLDEN

That was awesome! You are like the coolest uncle ever!

Peter smiles.

PETER

I know!

Holden walks past his mother JAYNE (40's) on his way out. She approaches Peter, they hug fondly.

JAYNE

Thank you Peter. That was indeed awesome. You certainly haven't lost your imagination that's for sure.

Peter looks at Jayne playfully.

PETER
You were listening in?

Jayne nods.

JAYNE
You know me!

PETER
What makes you think it was my
imagination?

JAYNE
Oh please, hundreds of sharks and
then you facing off against big
whitey only to be pooped on. If
that had been in your books no-one
would have believed it.

PETER
That last bit was the PG-13
version. The truth is slightly
different.

Jayne frowns.

JAYNE
What do you mean?

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. UNDER THE OCEAN

We are back at the face-off between Peter and the great white shark.

Jayne has replaced Holden as a floating witness.

The shark drifts closer to Peter. He raises his right arm towards the shark's mouth like an offering.

The shark opens it's mouth to reveal hundreds of viciously sharp teeth.

Carefully, almost delicately, the shark scrapes it's teeth against Peter's flesh with enough pressure to break the skin.

Peter winces. Blood seeps out and spreads into red misty cloud.

The shark withdraws slowly.

Suddenly it wheels around and swims frantically away.

BACK TO SCENE

JAYNE

But...but, that was all made up
just to teach Holden a lesson
wasn't it?

Peter rolls up his sleeve to reveal a long, jagged scar down
his arm. Jayne gasps in shock.

JAYNE (CONT'D)

It really happened?

Peter smiles wryly.

PETER

I'll leave that for you, the
audience to figure out.

He winks, pats her on the shoulder and leaves her stood in
shock.

Jayne is frowning, trying to piece the puzzle together.

JAYNE

(to herself)

No it can't be. But then how did he
get that scar? He's never showed
that to me before.

Peter sticks his head around the corner.

PETER

(loudly)

BA-DUUM!

Jayne jumps in shock.

JAYNE

Peter! You asshole!

FADE OUT.