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

Holden shrugs his shoulders; whatever!

Did you know I wrote a book once?

Really?

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

Holden sits up, intrigued.

Oh wow, cool!

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.

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

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?

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

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

HOLDEN
Wow!

PETER
Wow!

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)
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 its mouth to reveal hundreds of viciously sharp teeth.

Carefully, almost delicately, the shark scrapes its 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 wrily.

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.