

The Shark Play

By Miranda Jonte

Cast of Characters

DESIREE SULLIVAN: 35 years old, a shark biologist

BEN COREY: 35 years old, a shark biologist

VINCE: 30-55 years old, a cameraman

Place

The Farallon Islands, San Francisco, CA

Time

October

Prologue:

The following is ideally set to music.

July. Outdoors. SULLY and BEN are a well-oiled machine, the kind that comes with years of working together on a shared love of their jobs. They are friends, colleagues, and respect and like each other immensely. They are unloading their boat, a wordless, practiced dance that involves reaching for, and handing each other, this and that, with no verbal cues. At one point, they end up with the other's shirt, simultaneously tossing the correct one to each other. They are switching their summer clothing for cold weather clothing: long pants, windbreakers. They finish at roughly the same time. SULLY jumps on his back and watches him work over his shoulder. BEN is setting his watch.

BEN

See you in September-

SULLY

September, baby! *(She jumps off and grabs a backpack. As she exits, she gives a war whoop)*

The lights dim and VINCE, the cameraman, enters.

Sc. 1

Outdoors. BEN is gearing up for their day on the water. VINCE is adjusting his equipment.

BEN

(To VINCE, friendly) You gonna be ok on the boat? (VINCE ignores him) It's choppy than it looks. I mean, it's not the 50 yard line, right, man? Go 'Niners. (VINCE gives BEN a look of disdain. SULLY comes tearing onto stage)

SULLY

Oh my God that was amazing!

BEN/ SULLY

Did you see it?

SULLY

(Duh) I was at the lighthouse!

BEN

The email-

SULLY

No, the attack.

BEN

No, I sent an em- I forwarded you the email-

SULLY

Do I look like I check email?

BEN

Did you look at your texts?

SULLY

Do I look-

BEN

I got the job.

SULLY

Oh yeah? What job? Where we going?

BEN

Are you serious? *(VINCE gives them body microphones to attach. Dropping this conversation for now)* I think there's going to be a lot of activity today. *(They survey the ocean surrounding them)*

SULLY

(To VINCE, matter-of-fact) You gonna be ok on the boat? Not the 50 yard line. Choppy. *(To BEN)* Producers said the numbers are huge this morning, bigger than any of the other years. Combined. *(He says nothing)* You're reading Jaws again on your webcam to all the kids watching at breakfast.

BEN

Kids love sharks.

SULLY

I read Jaws when I was eight years old and it destroyed me. It fucked me up, Ben. *(BEN shoots her a look. To VINCE, pointedly)* Are we rolling? *(Continuing)* I mean seriously destroyed me. I would not get into a swimming pool by myself. I would not go into lakes, I would not swim in rivers, I would not go into swimming pools. Why is that funny? I was traumatized.

BEN

Because you're a shark biologist. Can we-? *(Gestures 'go talk')*

SULLY

I'm on in five, don't know about you.

BEN

OK. We good? Live. You ready? Don't curse. (*VINCE nods and gives the thumbs up, counts down from 3-2-1, points at them to 'go'*)

SULLY

Good morning everyone! I'm Desiree Sullivan, and I'm with Dr. Ben Corey, we are Sully and Ben, the Shark Squad. We're at Southeast Farallon, 27 miles off the coast of San Francisco. We're in our third week here at FinTracer and we're very excited...

BEN

...because we're doing something a little different this year. Dr. Desiree Sullivan- Sully- and I, are doing our very first 24-hour live feed so whatever happens here you get to see in real time!

SULLY

There's a five second delay.

BEN

(*Gives her a baleful look*) That's probably good. Thank you for joining us again this year, we've been coming to you from the Farallones for...seven years?

SULLY

Seven years. Farallones in the fall, from Gansbaai every June and we've never done a live feed-

SULLY/ BEN

(*Simultaneously*) No pun intended- (*They knock wood on the boat*)

SULLY

You can hear the sea lions behind us, they're pretty loud, and as you know, sea lions and elephant seals are the favorite snack of the great white, which is exactly why we are here, and why you've joined us, you love those gorgeous creatures- we're in the area off the coast of California known as The Red Triangle- why's it called The red Triangle? Sharks and seals, baby, sharks and seals, they go together like pb & j, though the seals probably don't think so, but that's the cycle of life.

BEN

(*Softening her sometimes-abrupt pragmatism*) And The Red Triangle reaches from Bodega Bay up north, covers the Farallones, going on down to Monterey. FinTracer's been out here for three weeks now- can you see- Gray House- Gray House is where the scientists stay on Southeast Farallon- it's the only inhabited- inhabitable- island of the Farallones- and it's old, it's been standing for a hundred years,

SULLY

When the wind really gets going it whips through the house and howls like-

BEN

A banshee-

SULLY

But it's just the wind. Banshees aren't real. Now the sharks-

BEN

It was quiet the first week, but, the big one, the one we've all been waiting for has been patrolling Maintop Bay the last ten days or so-

SULLY

Queen Elizabeth-

BEN

Queen Elizabeth. She is a beauty. She clocks in at a whopping 19ft long, two tons, and her compadres-

SULLY

The Ladies In Waiting- who are between 15-16ft. long- they're also cruising these waters. We've seen some spectacular kills-

BEN

The sharks are starting to make their appearances- we've accounted for the Pet Shop Boys, all between 12-14ft. long-

SULLY

Remember, the females are bigger-

BEN

And they're skinny, they're always on the gaunt side when they come back to us in the fall, but they're here, they're curious as ever, and they'll start to fatten up as they feed.

SULLY

One of 'em's got really deep, gnarly, what look like propeller wounds, it's gotta hurt, but sharks are amazing animals, their ability to heal is one of many the reasons sharks have been around, and remain mostly unchanged-

BEN

-For the last 400 million years-

SULLY

They pre-date trees!

BEN

Who else? We've seen The Fonz, we haven't seen Chachi yet.

SULLY

Yeah, we're a little worried, it's the second year in a row we haven't had a sighting. Chachi's always been a little goofy, kind of a big sheepdog, and we hope that he didn't find himself in the cull they did in New South Wales last year.

BEN

(Cutting her off) We hope Chachi's ok out there. For those of you just joining us, we're out here on Maintop Bay, coming to you live from our trusty boat, the Lilypad. We're wrapping up our year of FinTracer here at the Farallones, we're rowing out, we've got some additional tracking devices for the sharks, so hopefully we can tag some more. *(Holds one up)* They're not easy to attach-

SULLY

Could lose an eye-

BEN

Could lose an arm-

SULLY

But whatever you do, don't drop 'em, because they're about four grand each, and Dr. Ben had to schmooze at a big fancy party to get them. Did you wear a tux?

BEN

No.

SULLY

Ok! So now we just hang out and wait. *(Dropping their on-air personas)* You were totally wearing a tux. *(VINCE indicates they are still on the air)* And we are still live! *(Fumbling in the hard case for the index cards, which she hands to BEN)*

BEN

Should we do some questions?

SULLY

Yeah!

BEN

From Dylan, who is in Boston, and in the 5th grade: *(Reading)* Is Gray House haunted? Yes. Gray House is haunted. *(SULLY, unseen by BEN, shakes her head 'no' at the camera)* Last night, I was writing in the log- part of our job is to record what we see on the island that day-

SULLY

Which takes Dr. Ben forever-

BEN

Because I actually record the day's activities. You: 'White caps today. Big Mama getting fat. Half a seal found on South East Rock. It was dead.' Well. That's Desiree's.

SULLY

‘And as the sun rose, softly, like a caress, over the craggy hillocks known affectionately and reverently, as ‘The Devil’s Teeth-‘

BEN

That’s not bad.

SULLY

You’re really flowery.

BEN

(Back to his story) I’m writing in the log, and the rocking chair starts rocking.

SULLY

Were you sitting in it?

BEN

(Ignoring her) I was at the table, and there are mice, there are creatures, but that chair started rocking, and there was no one in it. Dr. Sullivan was upstairs in her room. *(She pulls out a spool of fishing line to show the camera she is the culprit)*, It was spooky. *(Confirming)* It was spooky.

SULLY

Don’t you think it’s ironic for a scientist to believe in ghosts?

BEN

You espouse the healing power of chocolate.

SULLY

Chocolate releases serotonin. Serotonin is a chemical. Chemicals are science.

BEN

There are more things in heaven and earth-

SULLY

No. *(A large wave jolts the boat)* It’s feeling sharky though, isn’t it?

BEN

Yeah. *(Another wave lurches them forward. They steady themselves)* They’re here. *(To VINCE, who has not been having an easy go of it)* Little choppy, huh? Ok, next question, from Louise, who is nine, and lives in Margate. Hi Louise. *(Reads)* Can you pet a shark like you can pet a dog?

BEN/ SULLY

(Simultaneously) No.

SULLY

A shark has skin that is made up of millions of teeth- it’s like sandpaper, it’s very rough, and we hear about people getting bitten by sharks, but- *(Gives it to BEN)*

BEN

Getting sideswiped by a shark, it can scrape you pretty badly, even if they're just bumping you to figure out what you are. Do not attempt to pet, feed, or even say hi to one. You do your thing, let them do theirs, they'll leave you be. *(A huge wave rocks the boat. VINCE puts down camera and pukes over the side, miserable. They hand him a rag. BEN hands him a candy)* Ginger. It'll help.

SULLY

He knows that because the first two years he rode the lift from the boat onto the island-

BEN

There's no landing dock. It picks you up like the claw machine that gets the toys but never actually gets the toys, because it's a dupe, and you have to stand on this little disc and hold on to the ropes while it lifts you up.

SULLY

He tossed his cookies into Farallon Bay. Twenty feet down.

BEN

Yeah, yeah.

SULLY

Brought the sharks though. All the beasties love the vomit. *(VINCE pulls back sharply from edge of boat as a shark inspects the vomit)*

BEN

That's a Pet Shop Boy. He's harmless.

SULLY

I fucking love this job. *(Explaining away the cursing)* His camera's down. *(She sits back and closes her eyes, soaking up the sun, the ocean, everything)*

BEN

Sully.

SULLY

Yeah.

BEN

The job.

SULLY

Yeah? Cool. Where are we going?

BEN

Baltimore.

Baltimore. What's in Baltimore?

SULLY

The National Aquarium.

BEN

Nation- aquarium?

SULLY

Yes.

BEN

What do they want us to do?

SULLY

They asked me to run it.

BEN

SULLY

An aquarium? *(Pause, as she tries to catch up)* Like, inside? Not outside? *(Catching up)* But you do field work. What about field work? Is it year-round?

BEN

Yeah.

SULLY

Why? What about Gansbaai? And Guadalupe? Will they let you off for that? 'Cause I was thinking we could add Cape Cod in, for like, two weeks, in August-that might be really crowded though and the public might get sick of us-

BEN

(With finality) It's year round, Sully. You're being a jerk.

SULLY

I'm- *(They notice a wake in the waves, sit up and look around, spotting the boat in the water)* What is that? It's not a dive boat. And Rod's boat wouldn't make that much wake. *(Grabs binoculars)* It's KRON.

BEN

KRON? Channel 4?

SULLY

Yeah.

BEN

What are they doing? *(Hands him the binocs)* Cameras, bunch of kids, and...what are they doing?

SULLY

Why is a news boat in Mirounga Bay?

BEN

Wait, they've got the Rescue Rangers on board.

SULLY

The cartoon?

BEN

(The correct term) Ocean Rangers.

Over a loudspeaker:

REPORTER

We have the Sea Lion Rescue Squad, the Ocean Rangers, with us today. You've been following the harrowing, and heartening, saga, of rescue and rehabilitation of Flossy and Mojo. These two sea lions, found injured at Pier 39 last Spring, have won our hearts here in San Francisco, and the city has named them its honorary mascots. *(VINCE has recovered enough to pick up his camera and resume recording)*

CHILD'S VOICE

We're so excited! The sea lion people fixed their flippers and gave them food and they're all better!

BEN

Why are they on the water.

CHILD

Flossy is my favorite. He waves at me with his flipper!

CHILD 2

I like their whiskers! My whole class made them get-well cards!

REPORTER

Is there anything you'd like to say to Flossy and Mojo before their voyage home?

CHILD

I love you Flossy!

BEN

You have got to be kidding me. *(Begins waving his arms)* No! No! Stop!

REPORTER

Oh! There we go, they're opening the slide! *(Cheers go up from the boat)*

SULLY

Stop! Stop! Close the slide!

REPORTER

And into the water they go!

SULLY

Goddammit! Why do we not have a bullhorn?

REPORTER

For all you folks watching at home, the day has come to bid bon voyage to the intrepid pinnipeds who won our hearts. Flossy and Mojo are getting their first taste of health and freedom, thanks to Ocean Rangers.

SULLY

Maybe they'll be fine.

(Count of 3-2-1. REPORTER and people on boat scream in horror. SULLY and BEN flinch and retreat)

BEN

Oh, man. *(BEN and SULLY race back to watch the gore. They are scientists after all)*

CHILD

He bit Flossy in half!

REPORTER

Maybe he's ok, he's still swimming. *(Reacts as the rest of Flossy is swallowed. Children cry)*

SULLY

(With no small amount of joy and awe) That's fucking terrible! *(VINCE vomits over the side again)*

BEN

I think that was Big Mama.

SULLY

That was Big Mama. *(VINCE shoves camera at her and sits down. She hands it to BEN)* Questions! *(Pulls out index card)* What is a kill like? From Mitchell in Massachusetts, 9th grade. That's very apropos! Well. It's usually sudden. White sharks are ambush predators. And what always surprises me- and I've been doing this since I was a kid, with my dad- is the blood. We think of blood as red, but during a kill, it's a bright orange spray. It's like a flare. And the smell is very heavy, it's very oily. There's usually what looks like an oil slick on top of the water. And the way an attack works is the shark bites its prey and leaves them bleed to death before coming back for the rest, which was just broadcast on TVs across the Bay Area. There's a reason the great white is one of the apex predators of the ocean. *(BEN puts the camera down)*

BEN

Sully.

SULLY

What, Ben.

BEN

I told you about this opportunity three months ago. *(She does not answer)* I have kept you in the loop completely. And you have ignored every communication-

SULLY

I haven't gotten-

BEN

You have ignored every communication.

SULLY

It's a fucking aquarium, Ben.

BEN

It's stability.

SULLY

This is stable. *(They sway as a wave hits the boat)*

BEN

I want a family.

SULLY

What?

BEN

I want a family.

SULLY

You have a family. You spend every Thanksgiving with me and my nieces and nephews in Monterey- my sister loves you- you see your parents in Jo'burg all the time-

BEN

My own family.

SULLY

Where is this coming from? Did you meet someone? Are you dating people for that purpose? I know that men have biological clocks too-

BEN

I took the job, Sully. They called me this morning. You were the first person I told. I want a family.

SULLY

You've said it four fucking times, alright, I got it. Keep your skirt on.

BEN

What is your problem?

SULLY

What is your problem? *(She takes another card. He reluctantly obliges and picks up the camera)*
 What is the fastest fish in the sea? Do you mean fish or do you mean shark, because all sharks are fish, but not all fish are sharks. *(He shoves camera at her and answers as she clearly is not OK)*

BEN

The fastest shark in the sea is the mako shark. The shortfin mako is so fast, it's been classified as a sportfish by the National Wildlife and Game Association. And they're not only fast, but they can also jump out of the water, propelling themselves up to 30ft. high. It's called breaching. *(He pulls out another card)* What shark has the worst bite? From Noah, 3rd grade, El Cerrito. Hey Noah. Well, any shark bite is not a good thing, but I think some of the worst damage I've seen has been by cookie cutter sharks, and by makos. *(He stops and looks at her)* Sully.

SULLY

(Turns camera around) Any shark can ruin your day, Noah.

BEN

Sully. *(She looks at him)* This life-

SULLY

This amazing, awesome life that we have-

BEN

This nomadic, itinerant-

SULLY

Redundant.

BEN

Every few months, it's off to live on a boat, it's flying to another continent-

SULLY

Every year- it's the same destinations, the same schedule- it's clockwork. It's reliable- it's stable.

BEN

Aren't you tired?

SULLY

No.

BEN

Don't you want to put down roots?

SULLY

I have. I thought you loved this. Being us.

BEN

I do. But. I think there's more.

SULLY

Move to San Francisco. The market's insane, but- and if you want to date, God knows you gotten enough proposals in your fan mail, they like you more than they like me-

BEN

They like you plenty-

SULLY

That's true, they like me a lot- I'll call Point Reyes, I'm sure there's an opening, or Monterey, even- wasn't there a woman there who sent you her underwear-?

BEN

Why are you so upset about this?

SULLY

Are you serious? Because three times a year I get to meet up with my favorite person in the world at some exotic location and study the coolest animals on the planet while every **kid** on the planet cheers us on. Because together we are Sully and Ben, the Shark Squad, and without you I'm just Sully, party of one, shark but no squad, and who's gonna wanna watch that?

BEN

That is bullshit. I can think of five scientists off the top of my head who would love to take my place-

SULLY

Is one of them Matt the ornithologist who hit on me at the ecology dinner by telling me 'I hope you smell like fish?'

BEN

I can't think of a single woman who would want a man who is gone for six months out of the year.

SULLY

Military wives do it all the time.

BEN

I'm not in the military, Sully.

SULLY

So she goes with you! *(Gestures to VINCE who is in a huddled heap)* Make sure his arm is in the boat- *(BEN tucks his arm back in)*

BEN

There is no woman in the world who would say yes to this, to the blood, and the guts, and not showering for days, and having a child- raising a family this way?

SULLY

My dad raised me this way-

BEN

Exactly.

SULLY

Exactly, what?

BEN

You're alone. Sorry.

SULLY

I love my life. I have loved my entire life. I had the greatest childhood in the world, and I think I'm one of the luckiest people on the planet to get to do what we do. And I'm sorry that you think in order to be viable to a woman as a partner, you have to work a 9-5 job and wear a tie, and live in a Craftsman-

BEN

I never said Craftsman-

SULLY

I like them- Ben. You can have both. You can have both.

BEN

I met someone.

SULLY

(Pause) Oh. You didn't tell me.

BEN

You'd just broken up with Jeff.

SULLY

Oh. *(The penny drops)* She's in Baltimore.

BEN

She's at Johns Hopkins. She's a psychologist.

SULLY

Psychology is a soft science.

BEN

Desiree Sullivan.

SULLY

Johns Hopkins! That is impressive. And you can have brainiac babies. That you never take out of the state. Fuck Shark Squad. And you know what? Fuck you. And fuck Baltimore. (*VINCE pukes again*)

BEN

What is going on? (*Beat. She then kisses him, hard*)

SULLY

Ben Corey, you are the love of my life. (*He is blindsided*) You are the love of my life.

BEN

(*Absolutely blindsided*) Sully.

VINCE

(*Picks his head up*) Guys. The sound's still rolling. (*They stare at each other*) You gonna go for it?

Blackout

**Playwright's note- BEN'S final line is open to interpretation of any company performing this piece. I leave it to them to decide the tone of his reaction, and future, of SULLY and BEN.*