



WHAT LIES BENEATH

Her mission: to test waterproof makeup... while swimming with sharks. From psyched-out to sweet surrender, **Holly Millea** gets stranger in paradise

It's that time of year again—Shark Week—the time that sends my editor Liesl into a frenzy of overexcitement and bizarre teeth-baring. Liesl has a thing for sharks, like some people have for puppies and pandas, and I have for Rafael Nadal. So it comes as no surprise that she thinks it would be fun to swim with sharks, or even more fun to send *me* swimming with sharks—a wet dream she validates by turning it into an assignment to test the waterproofness of waterproof makeup and the latest sun- and sea-related essentials.

Isn't this a job for someone higher up on the editorial food chain—or a Navy SEAL? "I'd love to go," Liesl says, pulling a

sad face. "But I'm allergic to salt water."

Let's send Emily—ELLE's beauty director! Liesl shakes her head: "Eight months pregnant."

Deputy editor Maggie Bullock?

"We can't afford to lose her."

How about an intern? The place is crawling with them!

"Hel-lo? Who's our Beauty Adventur-ess?" Liesl grabs my shoulders. "Holly, this assignment has your name written all over it!" She forgot to add...in blood.

Emily appears, beaming, looking beatific. She hands me a great big go-bag: "These beauty products will protect you," she says. "Godspeed."

But, I'll be in a shark cage, right? Liesl sighs, hugs me good-bye, and asks, "Any last words?"

"Yeah, when Emily's water breaks, you'd better make a run for it."

Welcome to Paradise Island, just off beautiful Nassau, in the Bahamas, where the drinking age is 18 and the shuttle-bus

seats are covered in plastic. Before I begin, let's get some things straight: I don't like sun. I don't like sand. I don't like swimsuits. And I especially don't like a sinus infection, from which I'm currently suffering. Though this did not dissuade Liesl from sending me off to meet my fate, or, in her words, "Get your ass on that plane," explaining, "It's my duty to see to it that you do your duty. The magazine is counting on me."

Because I'm also suffering from low self-esteem, abandonment issues, and Stockholm syndrome, Liesl has my sympathy. Hence, I include her in my last will and testament, written herewith, from my ocean-view room at the Reef Atlantis hotel, on the back of this pink flamingo postcard: "...and to Liesl, I leave the entire contents of my go-bag: Sanuk flip-flops made from recycled yoga mats; Benefit's waterproof They're Real! Mascara and Push-Up Eyeliner in blue, green, purple, and brown (you'll thank me for it through your tears at my



funeral); Bleach London Swamp Spritz hair texturizer; Shiseido WetForce sunscreen (very high-tech—water contact amps the UV protection by 20 percent); La Mer self-tanner; Bobbi Brown Beach Body Scrub (removes rough skin and survivor guilt); and Olay Marine Bio-Active Mouthrinse. As a bonus prize, I also leave to you my advance screening copy of *Sharknado 3: Oh Hell No!*, autographed by Tara Reid.

“To Emily, I leave the entire contents of the minibar.”

I sign my name, pop a Sudafed Sinus Extra Strength tablet, don my ill-fitting bathing suit, tuck in my thighs, and, armed with nothing but a pair of floaties, march off to the island’s Mayan Temple Shark Lagoon to do battle with sharks—ready to bat them away with my Benefit They’re Real! Beyond Blue mascaraed eyelashes, which are more than a little intimidating, with every lash armored in neon color, superthickened, and stretched

to eat fish that are sick or dead already. They eat 135 pounds of fish a week!”

“Yeah? I bet you didn’t know that the average person has 100 upper eyelashes and 80 lower eyelashes!”

“Sharks mate in the month of May!”

“Well, an eyelash only grows for 30 to 45 days, which is why they don’t grow as long as the hair on your head!”

A handsome Bahamian, a young Sidney Poitier type, interrupts our competitive tête-à-tête and introduces himself. “I’m Captain Daril Davis. Will you be walking with the sharks today?” Actually, I’ll be running from the sharks today. He smiles, handing me a liability release form. Among the list of questions on the waiver: “Do you currently have a cold, sinusitis, or bronchitis?” Egad.

I sign my life away, say see ya to SpongeBob SmartyPants, zip myself into a short wet suit, watch a quick shark do-and-don’ts instructional video, and make my way up to the dive deck with a handful

But at the bottom, I’m not at all okay. I can’t bring myself to let go of the ladder’s last rung. Phillip, who’s diving with a mask and mouthpiece, offers his hand. I latch onto it, locking my other hand onto his forearm. It’s not that I’m afraid of the sharks. I’ve been slammed with a darker fear: being here *now*.

I’m trapped. My heart is kicking against my chest: Get me out of here! Swamped in cortisol, I can’t let my mind go off and wander back to the past (a favorite pastime) or run away predicting the future (most often anxiously, sometimes hopefully). I’m being forced by sharks and water pressure and Liesl to park in my headspace. It’s tight. I can hear myself think. I hear the music teacher in *Whiplash*: “Were you rushing or were you dragging?” Yes, yes, always one or the other. I’m afraid I’ll never be the blissful in-between. When was the last time I read a book? Finished a book? I hate Facebook. I have to get off the In-

I’VE JUST SET MY RINGTONE TO “STAYIN’ ALIVE” (AND THRILLED THAT I STILL AM) WHEN MY PHONE STARTS SINGING. “HI, HOLLY? THIS IS TARA REID CALLING.”

to such a mascara-y length that they’re sweeping the inside of my sunglasses.

I elbow my way through a throng of shiny, sun-hat-wearing tourists smelling of coconut oil, drinking rum-centric drinks, and snapping photos in front of the plexiglass window of a 20-foot-deep tank swarming with 22 sharks. From somewhere in the crowd, the ominous strains of a *Jaws* ringtone goes off—*da dum...da dum...da dum...dadadadadum!* People laugh. I need a Xanax. Feeling a tug on my floatie, I turn around to find a boy, maybe nine, who is sunburned and towheaded, with his hair gelled high, wearing yellow sunglasses and a SpongeBob SquarePants tee; the kid’s physical resemblance to the sponge is uncanny. “Do you know what kind of sharks those are?” he asks. No, sorry. “That brown one is a nurse shark; it has two dorsal fins. They’re known as the Labradors of the sea. And that one”—he points to what looks exactly like a great white—“that’s a Caribbean reef shark. They’re hyperactive; they have to keep moving in order to breathe.”

Me, too! I shake his hand. “Thanks for the intel.”

“Hey!” He follows me. *Where* is this kid’s mother? “I betcha didn’t know these sharks are pescatarian—they like

of co-adventurers, none so plump as me.

I step onto the ladder to make the 20-foot descent into the tank, and I lower myself until the water is chest level. Two of the dive masters, Brian Kelly and Kendrick Sherman, place on my shoulders a small backpack holding a scuba cylinder filled with 3,000 PSI of compressed oxygen. Next comes a massive, spacelike helmet over my head. They attach the oxygen hose between the cylinder and the helmet and turn the air on—I hear a popping noise and then *ssssssss* as it flows inside.

Sensing my anxiety, the third dive master, Phillip Campbell (think Kanye West), volunteers to shadow me. I start to descend, stopping every second step as instructed to equalize the air pressure building up in my head. Taking my hand off the slick, algae-covered rail, I slide it under the helmet, pinch my nose, blow against my ears (excruciating), carry on, and repeat. Only the third time, I slip and panic, bowing my head to look down (an instructional video no-no) and momentarily flooding my helmet with water, much of which I swallow. Yes, I’ve ingested bacteria-ridden, shark-excrement-and-chum-filled water. I’m going to be sick.

Phillip signals, “You okay?” I nod.

But everyone else would still be on, searching, searching, searching for something, leaving me disadvantaged and, worse, leaving me behind. What will they find? What won’t I know? What are they Googling now? What deep knowledge are they accruing? What great life hack will they discover that will change their lives and not mine? I think of the line from that Mary Oliver poem: “Listen, are you breathing just a little, and calling it a life?”

I can’t breathe through my nose, not even a little. Through the mouth, nice and easy, slow and deep, in...and out... in...and... I’m feeling light-headed. My mask is fogging over from the heat of my breath. Phillip makes a wiping motion in front of his face. I let go of his arm and move to put my hand inside my helmet to wipe it off, and he pulls my hand down. He signals to Kendrick, who goes up to the surface. There’s a huge splash above, bubbles everywhere. I feel a weight lifted from my back, and suddenly, the sound of absolute silence. The *ssssssss* stops. Cut off. No air. It’s like I’m stranded on the moon. In space, no one can hear you scream.

Just as I’m about to try, the hissing starts anew, stronger than before, clear-

ing the fog. What the f—k just happened? Then this thought: *Shark! Massive, beautiful, soaring, close.* Phillip reaches out, brushing his hand against its belly as it passes. I reach out too. But Phillip blocks my arm, shaking his head and wagging his finger, No, no, no.

Here's another disturbing reality I have to face. Now that I'm not panicked, I'm bored. (*Are you rushing, or are you dragging?*) I wave good-bye to the sharks and rise to the surface, where Captain Davis helps me onto the dive deck. I'm walking like a drunken sailor. "It takes a minute to get your balance back," he says, pulling up a chair. "You know what happened when you were down there?" He faux-hyperventilates. "You were breathing too heavy. These tanks last an hour, but after 15 minutes, they said your tank was empty. That's a record! I could see it in the water, the bubbles coming up. That's why we switched it."

Phillip emerges, massaging his hand: "She dislocated my thumb!" Sorry. "It's okay, pretty lady." (I notice that the Bahamians, men and women both, address people with honeyed words. Sweet!)

I completely forgot! How's my makeup? Is it still on? "Beautiful, so blue, your eyelashes," Captain Davis says. *Beyond blue.* "Very pretty. Very nice."

I promise to tell the world how they saved my life today, and they laugh, giving me high fives. After hugs good-bye, I leave, looking back across the Mayan temple to salute my captain. He, smiling, calls out, "Make me famous, baby!"

The first thing I do when I get back to my room is crack open the Olay Marine Bio-Active Mouthrinse, hoping that the ingredients—sea salt (an oral wound cleanser), algae, organic essential oils, CoQ10, and echinacea—will kill the shark-tank bacteria setting up house in my mouth. From the first swish, I'm pretty much swept away. After the initial sting of menthol and licorice root, my mouth is awash in fragrant oils: cypress, frankincense, orange, lemon. This is a big deal for us mouth breathers, as the oils prevent dry mouth, which leads to cavities and toxic breath and a whole host of other nasty ailments. (Your mouth is the front door to the rest of your body; your tongue is the welcome mat.)

An "Olay" Google search describes it as "an oral beauty product," which makes me chuckle. And here's an Instagram photo of my favorite model, Cara Delevingne, with actress Michelle Rodriguez, hamming it up, swigging from

Olay bottles. (Fact: You can actually drink this stuff and it won't hurt you.) Another fact: It's pricey—\$21 for 7 ounces—but cheaper than a Novocain shot.

I go into the bathroom to spit it out and look in the lighted magnifying mirror. My eyeliner and mascara are exactly where I put them. Not a single sign of smudging, flaking, or caking. And the neon color is crazy blue—frankly, too blue for a woman of my certain age. Cara and Michelle, on the other hand, could rock this look.

I FaceTime with my brilliant insurance-accepting dermatologist, Sheryl Clark, MD, to show off my lashes and ask her some pressing questions. Like, how am I going to remove makeup that survived swimming with sharks and a trip down a 60-foot waterslide? (*That was the ultimate test.*)

"Wow!" Clark says, laughing. "They're, like, radioactive-glowing."

"Right? So crazy." I ask her what makes any mascara waterproof, and she gives me a chemistry lesson. "The basic ingredients haven't changed over the years—pigment, wax, oil, emulsifiers, and preservatives, and sometimes plasticizers as a minor additive to keep the ingredients supple," Clark says. "It takes years and millions of dollars to get FDA approval of new [cosmetic] ingredients. So what manufacturers do is vary the amounts of those ingredients to come up with a different kind of product. When you want something to be waterproof, you make it oil- and wax-based, because those polycarbons exclude water." (Benefit uses carnauba and candelilla wax.)

To remove the mascara's grip without losing lashes, "use an oil-based makeup remover," Clark says. "You fight fire with fire." She adds, "I have to say, I'm not sure anything waterproof should be an everyday thing. It does stick, so it can cause whiteheads, milia, sties...."

Any other advice while we're incurring roaming charges? "Yes, put down the eyelash curler. It's bad for the lashes—you're pulling as you're squeezing and shortening the length of the lashes by pulling out the ones still in the growing phase. Not to mention, you have a weird artificial crimp in your lashes. I can tell you curled them after applying your mascara—that's the worst!" (For the record, I'm never giving up my Shu Uemura eyelash curler, which, as Beauty Adventure readers know, can also open beer bottles.)

Like nurse and reef sharks, I prefer my fish already dead. I order sushi, pop the

cork on a bottle of Emily's inheritance, and settle into a *Sharknado* marathon, loving every crazy moment, and super-loving Tara Reid's makeup, which, like Tara herself, survives endless assaults and looks fantastic. On a tipsy whim, I send her a Facebook message, begging her to trade shark tales and makeup tips with me. I leave her my cell number. A girl can dream, can't she?

The next morning, I double the size of my hair with Swamp Spritz (hand to God, my hair is so big, it looks like a wig), trace my lids with Benefit's They're Real! Beyond Purple gel eyeliner, and coat my lashes in They're Real! mascara, all of which makes me look electrified and '70s-sexy for the plane ride back to New York, home of *Saturday Night Fever*. Speaking of fever, my sinuses have cleared!

And what do you know? In the car on the way to the airport, I've just set my ringtone to "Stayin' Alive" (and thrilled that I still am) when my phone starts singing. "Hi, Holly? This is Tara Reid calling." OMG! How much do I love Tara Reid right now? I tell Tara about my not-really near-death experience and how my makeup stayed on, and how impressed I am with her *Sharknado* performances and her makeup's performances, too! She laughs and spills her secrets: "I wear Armani foundation—it's light and stays put even though it's not waterproof. And Benefit's BadGal Waterproof mascara—love it—and M.A.C eye shadow and liner, which I apply with a lip brush inside my lids." (I didn't tell Tara then—but Tara, I'm telling you now!—Dr. Clark advises against this because lining the "waterline," the space between your lashes and eyeball, can put you at risk for bacterial infection.)

In addition to more makeup, *Sharknado 3* promises "more sharks, more special effects, and more fun," Tara says. "We're premiering in 86 countries on the same night! I never knew how much the world loves sharks." Before letting her go, I wish Tara luck and make her an honorary Beauty Adventuress for the month of July. "Thank you so much!" she says upon receiving what is sure to be one of many *Sharknado* accolades.

The driver pulls up to the United Airlines drop-off. "Here you are, beautiful," he says, handing me his card: Gladston King, Chosen Transportation Services, Airport, Weddings, Funerals, Proms. "My home will always be your home. I want you to come back and surprise me."

So lovely. Let's leave it at that. ●

Teasdale: Instagram



The Harry Styles Hair Stylist Award

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One-D hairstylist Lou Teasdale posts backstage and punk-beauty inspo along with affectionate selfies with Harry and the boys and lustworthy travel shots starring, of course, impeccable hair.