



Source: 'Cross-dressed terror suspect fled in burka', *The Times* in *The Australian online*, 10/10/06.

Tags: [water](#), [workplace](#), [animals](#)

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I thought I would have time. I worked it out: 25 minutes' drive to the beach, an hour for the walk, ten minutes in the ladies room at the Novotel to fix myself up, half an hour to get to the city. The interview was at 11.15 and I was leaving at 8.55, which left me 15 minutes' leeway for traffic situations. Of course I could always cut down on the walk, but that would defeat the purpose, wouldn't it?

It was an impulse decision. If I'd decided on the detour last night, I'd have got up early and been out of the house at six, to avoid the rush-hour traffic and get the best of the beach in the early morning light. Brighton beach an hour after dawn is out of this world, a vision from the Paradiso.

But I digress, because what was on my mind as I walked out the door, doing a quick check on the contents of my briefcase, was that voice. The one that talks in your head all the time, telling you do this, don't do that, don't forget the other, make sure about x, be careful to avoid y...The voice was all stirred up now. Well, naturally it would be. It was rehearsing for the interview like it had been doing incessantly, since the call came through three days ago. It would never have let me do the beach thing if I'd given it advance notice and having been sprung unawares, it was going ballistic.

'You're nuts. What if you got stuck in traffic? Like really stuck?'

The voice was scared, I could tell, because it was causing my heartbeat to do funny things making my movements jerky. I stabbed the keys into the ignition and missed, dropping them on the floor.

'Fuckn' idiot!' the voice shrieked out loud.

Then it changed its tune. As if in that moment it saw a chance of getting me back under control, it turned on the charm.

'They must really want you. They phoned you the day they got the application, didn't they? Must have opened the envelope, put the DVD in and gone—Wow. This is a future partner we're looking at here. The Lime Group. The most cutting edge Design company in the city, that's all. This is your daydream calling you, don't you realize? It's about to happen.'

I started up the car and backed out. Maybe, after all, I was just leaving early for the interview—allowing plenty of time for parking, and a quiet cup of coffee looking over my notes. But once I got on the road there was no doubt where the car was heading. It was going south.

My usual parking spot was free, just a couple of blocks from the beach front. I locked my jacket and briefcase in the boot and paced it down there, whipping off the high heeled interview shoes as I got to the steps and jumping barefoot into the deep hot sand. This hot in October? 32°

according to the car radio, but a southerly was expected. I dropped the shoes between two grassy hillocks just under the wall and set off, pulling my skirt out of splash range as I reached the water.

Some people don't like the shallows, where the water breaks in fine transparent rills and you can see the tiny fish adventuring right to the edge. They want pounding surf. Well they can have it.

Jelly fish get stranded here in the mornings, pure translucent things with perfect rounded forms. I flick them back into the water with my foot—actually quite a tricky exercise, because you have to work your toes well underneath them and make a strong, sharp movement, otherwise they just plop into the shallows, ready to be washed up again. The knack is to flick them about six metres in, where the cross currents will give them a chance of getting back to wherever it is they belong.

A few people are fishing down at the Kurnell end of the beach, and you have to duck under their lines. As I do so, the wind gusts and one of the rods keels over. It belongs to a boy of about ten. I walk on into a patch of heavy shadow which stretches across from the beach to the water, where choppy crests are developing. By the time I get to the nets at the end of the bay, the southerly has taken over and I turn to see the boy with his fishing rod tramping up towards the road. Some windsurfers have steered their craft into land and are packing up.

Quickening my pace, I head back towards the brick mountain of the Novotel but the sand is flying at me in a million tiny stinging missiles. The wind is in my face, in my eyes and ears, filling my mouth as I breathe. Something hurtles towards me on the ground—an empty sundae carton with its domed top still in place, aimed like a torpedo at my feet. The collision hurts.

The bay has twisted itself into a mass of sideways crests which all seem to be rushing in my direction and I can hardly see for the flying sand and the spray.

'This is serious,' pronounces the voice. 'This is what they call a weather event.'

I take my shirt off and wrap it around my head to shield my face from the worst of it and battle on feeling like something out of *Lawrence of Arabia*. Then out of the dark and crazy squall something is coming towards me, a figure swathed in towels so only the eyes are visible, moving fast with the wind at its back. As it comes level, the hands move wildly about the body then it veers towards me and makes a grab for my wrist. Words are yelled from a hollow between the layers of towel.

'Turn around! You can't get back that way!'

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Jane Goodall.*