

Not dressed for swimming

You saw me walk past. It was quite early. After the school run, just about, or when it would have been if it wasn't the summer holidays. The beach was quiet – not deserted – but the day was still young. The hum of day-tripping throng was not due to manifest for a good hour or two yet. You were sitting on the sand, the soft sand sandwiched between the sea wall and seaweed strewn by the high tide. You were about ten yards away from the damp sand which mapped the footsteps they would later trace and retrace. The sea was returning shorewards, slow but sure. A couple of hours until next high tide. You were there, alone, sketching the horizon. You often did this. It gave you purpose.

You had watched since I descended the steps, carved stone in loose spiral winding from the promenade. I walked with purpose to where small pools lazed atop saturated sand. Brisk, you would describe the walk. You looked around to locate the dog I wasn't walking, then scoured the shore for a new lead. A child? A beachcombing partner? Nothing obvious appeared; my incongruity fixated you. You had watched me walk closer then beyond. Something didn't sit well with you. The scene in front of your eyes made you feel unease. You are an artist, you are used to observing, making judgments. Of course you are imaginative; it goes with being creative. That doesn't mean you make things up.

Your eyes followed me as I paced onwards, wet sand kicking up around my bare feet. That was when you thought: I was not dressed for swimming. Not even for the beach really, although you could see I had eschewed shoes. You wondered why I

made a trajectory towards the sea, suited yet unbooted. It was towards the rocks, not the sea, you realised in a moment of clarity. Perhaps I had left something there. A dawn bather, maybe, who had forgotten his watch, or towel. Or maybe lost something; a wedding ring? That would be it. That would explain it.

Still your eyes remained fixed on me. The whole way, you watched. Not distracted by child-flung frisbee, nor wail of siren from the road behind. Heavy-winged gulls did not cause you to look away. You were curious as I approached the rocks. I might have removed my jacket; you are not sure. You saw me perch on the furthest rock, the one against which the biggest waves were pounding. I stood poised, arms outstretched. Tai Chi, you wondered? You watched me for a minute or two, on that rock, the ocean rolling in. The breakers were quite big over there; It was the spring tide. My arms remained wide. A voice called out your name. You startled, and glanced over your shoulder: Magda from the book club. You waved. You returned your eyes to where foam and white spray soared upwards from the rocks. You did not see me again.

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