

MORNING IMPRESSIONS IN THE SEA

It's still a while before sunrise. The sea is calm, *san ládi* – like oil. In my wetsuit, with mask, snorkel and flippers, I lie quietly on the surface. It's the end of retreat time for night-active animals.

Red starfish, looking almost dark brown in the twilight, will soon be hidden between rocks and stones. Most of the inevitable sea cucumbers have already gone. Since the wind has died down a few days ago the sand has settled and the water cleared. The sea bed looks like miniature dunes in a dim grey Sahara. I watch tiny scurrying hermit crabs. The patterns of their trails interlock with many others and can be seen a long way off. A group of mullet dig the ground for food with their sensitive barbels. My curiosity is gripped by a small bush of algae walking. It's a spider crab that camouflages itself by putting plants on top of its shell. Now it heads for shelter under a rock near the vast wood of sea weed.

There's a scorpion fish, motionlessly lying in wait for bait, almost invisible due to its camouflage that duplicates the stone. A juvenile moray eel has also retreated here into the small cave after its night hunt. A brown Comb Starfish hovercrafts the sand as if drawn by magic. I have to dive down to take a closer look. Immediately it starts vibrating and sinks into the sand within seconds. It has felt the change in my movements from the distance of a few metres. Just a star shaped mould remains.

A huge brown sea hare – the largest kind of nudibranch I've ever seen – moves through the dim blue with slow elegant flaps like a stingray. It will be hiding somewhere between the plants on the cliff. Over there on the smooth rock a crab tries its strength on breaking away a limpet, which of course has attached itself firmly in the threatening face of death. One of the claws has already lifted the shell by a hair's breadth. Time to work flat out to get to the yummy titbit. It's a sisyphus task, heavy labour for a little breakfast...

While I watch this fascinating spectacle without motion, the sun rises. All at once the brightness of a thousand new colours does magic to the picture. The liveliness of the new day paints the crystal clear water with all shades of blue and turquoise. Starfish get back their vivid red, and the smooth marble shines in flawless white. As an extra bonus due to the quiet surface, there's a gleaming net of silver rings moving smoothly over the ground in perpetual motion. Floodlight. An endless luminous pattern in slow fluctuation. Continually changing, continually dissolving and recreating its shapes.