

By Dan Dempster

Sunlight refracts gently through the water in the rock pools, illuminating the subtle colours and textures of the water's edge. It's warmer now, the winter storms have gone.



Dan Dempster

The wind dies through the casuarinas as the land cools in the warm evening air. I come about and head towards land in a more leisurely fashion than when I left, the sail filling gently. The sun is going down, the sky turning pink and orange. Will it be a good sunset tonight, she asks? I become aware of the treefrogs belting out their liquid evensong, as if the land is being played by raindrops. No rain about, but after hours in the salty air I smell land as a sweetness, the sweetness of fresh water held in the porous limestone, cradled by the tree roots and damp soil.

Later we walk to my studio along Richmond Road, and I become aware of a sweet scent borne on the soft, evening air - something straight out of my childhood. My companion breathes deeply, and wants to know what it is. *Cherry blossoms in March - orange blossoms? Can't be. Too late.* I'm uncertain, and it bothers me. I should know this.

Memories hover at the edge of my awareness, waiting. As we round the bend we come abreast of an enormous pittosporum in full bloom, with clusters of tiny white blossoms amidst dark green leaves spilling over the weathered limestone wall. We lean over to sniff the flowers, careful of fat industrious bees. I remember with a flood of pleasure the pittosporum tree outside my sister's window at Maycot, where we grew up, the scent wafting through our rooms in early spring. It was so much a part of my childhood, and I'd forgotten it. *I've been away too long.*

My lips are still salty, and then I receive the same long kiss I'm giving. *I'm breathing you.* I tell her this, because in this kiss I forget myself. A horse languidly clops past and the carriage wheels creak gently, but my eyes are closed, and now all I can smell is her.



'Summertime' Somerset, Bermuda
42" x 46" oil on linen

TIDEPOLS

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I stop running, stunned. The inshore boiler reefs ride high on a flat calm — ochres, reds and umbers against unretouched intensities of turquoise, blues and greens of the sparkling morning water.



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I'm on the cliff path above Stonehole Bay. I can see fish moving about the giant basins from here. I walk down Elephant Head to get a closer look, and sit down.

Another low tide, hands exploring the fairyland pillars at Coot Pond, the exposed algae on normally submerged rock brilliant ochres yellows and greens, the base of pitted, gnarled grey spires rising high against the blue afternoon sky behind Fort St. Catherine. Kissing shallows, sensual curves and secret niches of Catherine Rocks, vanilla essence of the warm skin of her neck, cool water lapping.

Warm sand underfoot soft, then coarse, dry then wet. Wavelets swirl and wash onto the tiny beach, arranging sand into shades

and densities to suit its mood. Large grains of pink sand high in the lee of gnarled rocks lay mute testament to the last winter storm.

My body shivers with the delight of the new, mind sparking in wonderment. I am seeing again for the first time, totally alive. I am pleased to be jolted out of my reverie.

Sandpipers run to and fro like little wind-up toys at the water's edge. The sand gives up impressions of life from a running child's footprint, a dog's heavy paw, a woman's languorous tread, and the sandpipers' trace racing lightly everywhere between.

Hauling myself out of the water I place my bare feet carefully on the barnacled rim, wary of fire sponges, corals and hidden spiny sea urchins. Peering into this magic realm I find an aquatic nursery full of brilliantly coloured baby fish vying for attention between brazen sergeants-major and well-camouflaged blennies.

Over the edge I can see parrotfish, bream and ocean surgeon, a couple of angelfish and a triggerfish. A sharp nip on the heel sends me leaping back into the sea, laughing.



"Sea Change", Tobacco Bay
St. George's.

Oil on linen, 9 x 12 inches

TIDEPOLS

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MAGIC

Moonlight glitters on the ruffled ocean, stretching miles away to the horizon, the clouds glowing softly with reflected light against an inky blue sky. It's too bright to see more than a few stars glimmering in the warm, humid air. My mind is pulled far over the horizon, with that odd sense of nostalgia and knowing. Leaves shimmering silver and black, branches brushed by soft full light of summer moon.

Fennel smells strongest early in the morning and late at night, when the ground is damp and chilly, when the salt lays unspoken in the breeze, and the wet rock crumbles under my grasp.

Will they really come, she asks. I smile at her, and squeeze her hand gently. Our feet dangle over the edge of the cliff, total darkness of the shadowed deep water below. I check my watch, unseen, to reassure myself. 56 minutes past sunset. It's like that every time, you wonder if it's really going to happen, if somebody just

made it up for you last time and you were lucky.

All of a sudden, a swirl and a glimmer, a spiral of green liquid light glowing in the dark. There!

Another, and another — she gasps, and my heart leaps with glee. In minutes the surface of the water glows and sparkles with green luminescence, liquid green stars in the deep black water, as far as the eye can see. It lasts for perhaps ten minutes, new bright swirls glimmering amidst older ones fading and dissolving, then fewer and fewer, and then the water is dark again.

Afterwards, we walk down the beach, into waves susurrating against the cool sand glowing softly pink, and in the full moon refracting through warm water not quite blue. As the moon hides behind the clouds the water turns dark. Turn around, I say, and as I stand up, the water runs down my arms, my chest in a sparkling liquid fire. I take her in my arms and as she lays back against me in the warm water I swirl her around me in the phosphorescence. I missed you.



Dan Dempster



"Prospero's Pool". Oil on board