**The Tale of Matty Trewhella**

The sea is fickle, sometimes calm; gentle even and at other times it rends and tears so it should not have been a surprise, as she was of the sea, that she was as fickle as the place of her birth.

So who am I, I am one of the countless numbers since time begun whose lives the ocean has claimed but I did not fight it, I did not weep and struggle but instead I walked into it with as much sense of purpose and as pride as if I was walking down the aisle of a church on my wedding day. But although the sea stole my life from me they say that if you listen carefully you can still hear my voice amongst all the many sounds that it can make from the gentle lullaby of the incoming tide on a calm Summers’ day to the crashing tympani’s of a Winter storm and for those that follow the stream down from the church in which I once sung it will be there for eternity alongside the rhythm of the waves as they beat upon the sand of Pendour Cove.

If all that remains of me is my voice then I am not surprised as my voice was a good one, the finest in all of Zennor so it was said which was why I was once the lead chorister at St Senara’s but I was also a good looking man too and despite their having no souls the mer people admire a fine singing voice especially if it the singer is lucky enough to be handsome too.

But however handsome I once was it was as nothing compared to her beauty for her hair was as golden as the sand at Sennen, her eyes as blue as corn flowers and the mouth, that I so loved to kiss, wide and generous. It is also said that the voices of the Women of the Sea are beautiful enough on their own to cause the fishermen and sailors that hear them to fall into the deepest of despairs because they must head for home and leave them behind. Now, I know this to be true and there is no cure for this despair and it gnaws at them and it haunts them and when finally ashore and amongst their own they can never lose the sound of its alluring and plaintive cry. Then their everyday lives became drab and joyless and all that they hope for is to return to the sea again to have one more chance to hear the song of the Merry Maids and no amount of begging from their wives and no amount of pleading from their children can gainsay them.

So, how did I get to meet a Woman of the Sea? Well, it may surprise you to hear but it was not at sea as I am not a fisherman but instead she and I would sing together in church and her voice would entwine around the melody that I carried as if it was ivy climbing upon the Tree of Life and all of the congregation would go silent to listen to us. Now if God Almighty is as jealous as I suspect Him to be then by stopping to honour and praise him with their voices then they all risked their own eternal souls through their silence but they will have to make their own peace with Him when their lives are done although I will have to wait until Judgement Day in order to plead for mine.

If I close my eyes I can still picture the very first time that I saw her on that Spring morning many years ago as she sat by herself at the back of the church. Now I have told you that she was beyond fair but what also set her apart was the manner of her dress because even amongst the Sunday finery of all the others she stood out. For none of the other women of Zennor would own, let alone wear to church, such a dress. It was of a rich, dark green velvet, the colour of the sea where it drops from the shallows into the depths and it covered her from her beautiful neck down to where, then, I supposed her toes to be. Now, forgive me for I was just a mortal man and so, even in church my mind sometimes wandered into temptation. For, during the sermon that day I stole a glance at her and those eyes of green and blue were there already waiting for me and they caught me as surely as if I was a mackerel chasing a feather on a fishermen’s line. Now, the end of the service couldn’t come soon enough and throughout it I continued to see if her eyes were still waiting for mine and I swear that they were there right until the communion wine passed my lips and when I should have been remembering ‘He whose blood was shed for us’, I looked back and she was gone.

Now I know that I was no longer a boy and that I should have known better but all of my thoughts during the days that followed were of her, the eyes that had followed mine, her lips that one day I may kiss, the rich and sumptuous green of her dress and her voice whose melodies had trapped me as surely as if she was one of the Sirens of Old. At night I dreamt that I swam within the blue green rock pools that were sheltered beneath the cliffs and fed, in part, by the fresh water of the stream that flowed by the church and that as I dived in she was there to greet me too. Firmly, she would lead me by the hand from the edge where all was safe towards the middle where the water was deepest and darkest and then I would be pulled by unseen hands into the depths.

Do you know how much I longed to see her again? Of course you do, you live, you breathe and you have fallen in love too, so you will understand that that next week both flew by and was an eternity too, that it was as good as life can be and also hurt as no other pain can and each night I prayed that she would be at church on the next Sunday.

But my prayers were not answered as she was not at church the following week, or the week after that or for the month that followed that too and yet the thought of her never left me. So possessed was I, that within my head all I heard was an endless begging of “Please be there again so that I can see you just once more.” And Time, the supposed Great Healer’ had clearly more important things to do with its own time as the longer it was since I had last seen her the more the hurt that hurt like no other grew until it cast all other thoughts from me as surely as if it was Saint Michael expelling Satan from Paradise.

And then she was there again, and those eyes sought mine out and mine were, of course, so willing to be caught. Maybe you would expect me to look back at that moment with regret as it led as clear as night follows day to such unhappiness and even my own death but I regret it not at all. For, what is a long and dull life when compared to those sweet moments when we are truly alive? And I sang, with all my heart, but not to praise the Lord but to entice her instead and her voice joined with mine and together it was such a thing of beauty that one by one the congregation stood in silence and listened.

After the service I saw her follow the path that led to the cove and I followed her as she knew that I would and she paused by a small waterfall that tumbled between a grove of trees and there I took her in my arms and held her, my longed for moment finally realised and my lips embraced her hair and then found her mouth and the joy of that one kiss made all the pain and waiting worthwhile. I let her go and she looked at me and in her eyes there flickered desire yes, but also something else, what was it? Was it fear at the strength of my feeling? It cannot surely have been that no-one had kissed her with such passion before because she was so beautiful?

I spoke to her, “Kiss Me.” I said simply and she closed her eyes and lifted her mouth to mine.

We embraced a few more times, and it was as if I was drugged but then she left and forbade me to follow, though she knew, of course, that I would not obey her though I pretended too and she accepted my pretending. At the sea’s edge she sat above one of the rock pools and as the waves broke over her a look of such joy overcame her. The look that you and I would have if after many years we finally found our dearest love again and then her green dress merged with the blue/green flowing water and she accepted the incoming tide’s embrace and with the smallest of efforts slid below and into the depths.

How often, after then, did we meet and kiss? Just three times and on the third, and final, time it was as if only a part of her were there. Perhaps, on that last time, I should have known then that I would never see her again.

So, how could something as small as a kiss from that beautiful mouth and as that look in her eyes as she raised her lips to mine for the first time have changed the path of my life for ever?

Only a fool, and a young fool at that with time, almost everlasting, stretching ahead of them and therefore so easy to waste, would let that happen and what sort of a fool do you take me for?

Well you cannot accuse me of being a young fool as when we kissed much more than half my life had already gone.

So what other fool would that make me?

Would I be the sort of fool that would deny a chance of a lifetime’s contentedness with another for the fear that once that choice was made, then she might return to be with me just once more? The sort of fool that would, lying alone at the end of each day, picture her lips and her breasts before sleep gathered to claim him? The sort of fool who would stand by the sea at Pendour Cove and sing in the hope that one day again her voice would be returned to mine and that both voices would once more entwine in harmony?

But, of course, you know the answer don’t you? Because I am that fool and, though I should do, I cannot regret it.

For if I began to regret, then none of the pain that I felt would have been worthwhile. Did I think that the more hurt that I felt the greater would be her gratitude towards me and therefore the greater my own eventual reward? As if I believed that I was a Knight in the Fairy Tales of old whose love is proved with every single cut left by the dagger like thorns that separate him from the Sleeping Princesses Castle? And like that Knight of old what did I really know about my Woman of the Sea? To inspire his devotion he had seen, just once, a picture of his Princess within a glass and to inspire mine I had just the memory of lips that were so exquisite to kiss but he lived within a world where love conquers all and where a man can show his bravery by fighting dragons but I live within this world and perhaps all I have shown is my own stubbornness by fighting the thought that what was so special to me was as of nothing to her.