

A SEA-SIDE SIREN.

BY S. J. NEWTON.

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CHAPTER I.

The fishing village of Donaldton is about the dullest places in winter, for a stranger; but in summer it is a romantic spot for those who can appreciate the beauties of nature. It therefore has several visitors during the warm months.

On a bright July day there came to one of the cottages, for a month's stay, a young woman so graceful in form, so charming in face, that those who saw her for the first time seemed to view her as a seraph or a goddess. Eva Bateman was accompanied by her aunt, a sedate old lady, who had outlived her love of fun.

The beach around Donaldton faces numerous caves in its rocky cliffs, and at low tide these are easily accessible, but at high water their existence is not discernible.

One day in the course of her explorations of one of these caverns Eva Bateman found, when it was too late, that the tide had risen and effectually cut off her retreat. Fortunately for her, her dangerous predicament had been observed by a young artist just then staying in the place, Archie Wallace, and, being an active young fellow, he lost no time in descending the cliff—it was not very precipitous—and removed the lady to a ledge of rock out of the reach of high water. Of course he gladly remained with her until the tide receded, when it was possible to return the way she had come.

Now the fact of being left alone for several hours in a position of more or less imminent danger, with a strikingly handsome young man who has just, at great personal risk, perhaps saved her life, cannot fail to make its influence felt on a woman, be she ever so reserved, and the natural consequence of the adventure was that Archie Wallace, having escorted his fair charge to the door of her cottage, was by her asked in; formally introduced to the sedate old aunt, and in a very short time found himself on terms of intimacy with the two ladies.

This had been upward of three weeks ago, and the important sea view on which the young artist had staked his reputation had not made much progress in the interval.

At the time this story commences he was sitting idly on the beach, looking dreamily at the sea before him, and thinking, as he always was, of her.

And she? Was she reciprocating his thoughts or what?

We shall not be accused of playing the part of Peeping Tom, perhaps, if we venture to glance inside the cottage where she resides. Her aunt—good soul!—has fallen placidly asleep. Rollo, Eva's Newfoundland dog, is lying at his mistress' feet, and she is in the act of writing a long letter to one of her bosom friends; an extract from it will serve our purpose:

"You can't imagine what he is like, so it is no use my attempting to describe him to you"

Know, then, that he is different in every respect from the men you and I are accustomed to meet; that he is a gentleman you will have gathered from my previous letters, but he is more than that. He is the very soul and embodiment of

all that is honorable and true. I am about certain that he reveres me, and, in fact, looks upon me as something almost too good to live! "Think of that, my dear. . . ."

And yet he has never said a word that could be construed into anything—You know what I mean. . . .

Is it not refreshing in this nineteenth century to find such a man? and it cannot be said I have failed to succeed in discovering it; and yet at times I am half sorry.

"Heigh ho! what's the use of moralizing. I may be in a fool's paradise, but I will enjoy it while I can; and now, dear—"

The sentence remained unfinished, for at that moment she recognized a well known footstep on the stairs, and in another instant the man she had been describing, with a "May I come in?" and not waiting for an answer, had entered the room.

He was undeniably handsome as he stood there, boating cap in hand, as the glint of the fast-setting sun shone upon his curly hair—a mere boy he looked, although reference to the old family Bible would have revealed the fact that he was in his twenty-fourth year.

"What a shame to remain indoors such an evening as this. Won't you come down to the beach and see the sun set? It is going to be a glorious evening, and I shan't have an opportunity of seeing many more of them."

"Are you going away, then?"

"Yes; I have exceeded the limit of the holiday I had allowed myself, by a full week; but it has been so pleasant here! I have been loath to tear myself away," he added in a serious tone. "But you will come won't you?"

"Yes, I'll come," and putting her hat on, she led the way. Rollo, as usual, testifying his pleasure at going out; and the old lady dozing pleasantly on.

It was, as he had said, a magnificent sunset, well worth coming out to see, and, possibly, it was the grandeur of the scene that led both of them to keep silent for a long time. She was the first to speak.

"How lovely it all is! Let us take the boat and go for a row." Had she said let us take a balloon, he would have been too willing to honor her, and with a strong push of his lusty arms, he soon had the boat—her boat, he had come to call it—afloat, and having seen that he was comfortably seated in the stern, was quickly pulling out toward the golden west.

If it had been pleasant on the beach, it was doubly so on the water, and as the oars splashed in the sea, and the light glanced on the ripples they made on the surface, it was a scene to arouse the artistic sympathies of the rower; and he looked, as indeed he was, supremely happy.

Presently he rested on his oars, and looked at his companion with unmistakable adoration expressed in his glance.

She felt its influence and shivered unconsciously.

"Why do you look at me like that?" she petulantly asked.

"Because I can't help it," he replied, simply. "You ought to be an angel."

The remark was said in all honesty, there was an unmistakable ring of truth about it, but it did not please her; on the contrary, she was annoyed.

"My dear boy, angels only exist in the imagination. At any rate, no woman is an angel or a saint either; I know I am not."

"I should be sorry to think otherwise."

"Oh, Archie, you are too good for this world. You have formed an altogether erroneous impression of me, but in time you will have come to see things in quite a different light—forgotten all about me, in fact."

"I can never do that."

"Oh, yes you will, when some new fancy seizes you. We have been excellent friends, haven't we? Well, why not let us remain so until—until—you tire of me?"

For a moment the man looked at her earnestly, and then, letting his oars drop from his hands, he leaned toward her, and before she knew what he was doing, had seized one of her hands in his, and looking at her in a way that made her wince, it was so passionately entreating, said, in a choking voice:

"Eva, I can never tire of you, for I love you—love you better than life itself—it's no use telling me that no women are angels when I know one that is. I have never dared to say this to you before, but when you looked as you did just now; I couldn't help it."

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