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Born into a devout Mormon family—and named after a mermaid
—a woman searches through tangles of Mormon doctrine to
discover that the deepest truths lie within.



ONE

THE LORELEI

1944

The young sergeant fixes his eyes straight ahead, desperate to make sense of the scene before him.

If only it would move closer, he thinks, riveted to the spot. There it goes again. What kind of crazy tricks are my eyes playing on me?

He stands alone on the jagged shoreline. He draws in a deep breath of cold Mediterranean Sea air and shoves his hands deeper into his worn army-issue jacket, trying to clear his head. Far to his right loom threatening cliffs, and in the distance fog hangs over the choppy sea, but it's the waves close to the rocky ledge near his feet that command his full attention.

Again, there's uproar in the waters. He tries in vain to determine the source of the disturbance just as something leaps high out of the waves.

Did I really see something green flip up? No, that's impossible. I'm so damn lonely, I'm fantasizing.

After all, fighting in the Second World War on the other side of the world could muck up anyone's head.

Yes, he rationalizes, I'm missing home so much, especially missing her, that I'm imagining things.

He turns away, but a murmuring sound grabs his attention and he jerks back around just as the waters bubble up with life. *Splash!* His eyes chase the bubble trail left behind as something

bursts through the surface, flips high in the air, and sprays sea foam all over his face. His fingers trace the salty wetness on his rough-shaven cheek. He gasps at the wonder of her as she continues whirling and spinning, revealing her glistening breasts, waist, and hips, which taper down to an outrageously green ... tail!

She continues diving in and out of the water, the bubble jewels in her red hair gleaming in the last beams of the low-hanging sun. He can't escape the pull of her sultry smile, her skin all shiny from the salty sea, or her long hair flowing down and caressing her mother-of-pearl thighs.

His mind reels in confusion. Rumors had swirled through his platoon of Lorelei, the mermaid who perched on a rock in the Rhine River and lured sailors into danger with her singing, but never in his maddest dreams had he considered her more than a legend, or that she might rove from river to sea. At least, not until now.

Her red hair, dripping in seashell fragments, triggers both intrigue and frustration. It reminds him of another redhead, thousands of isolating waves away. How he aches to be with his new bride. He misses her creamy pale skin, her innocent touch, and her arousing aroma.

He closes his eyes, remembering the last time they were together back in the States. When he opens them moments later, the water lies placid, a single ripple dancing across the surface. The air hangs heavy with sea scent as his mind spins with questions. Could the siren really exist? His finger touches the dripping splatters still on his face, and the assuring wetness makes him smile.

The memory sticks fast in my father's mind throughout the

rest of the war, along with the memory of her name—Lorelei.



Not many years later, I climb up on his lap, place my arms around his neck and ask, “Daddy, how did you and Mommy choose my name?”

We settle back in his big chair. He puts his rough chin up close to my ear and shares the magical tale of the Lorelei.

“Oh no, Daddy!” I say, “You named me after a fish lady? A naked fish lady? How *could you* name me after a mermaid?” I feel a flush creep across my cheeks. After all, I’ve seen pictures of half-naked mermaids.

He grins, a distant look comes into his eyes, and I get no more out of him.

As I grow older, my embarrassment continues to rise as I see pictures of the Lorelei brimming with raw sexuality. I soon discover that mermaids are rarely, if ever, modest. Mormons aren’t keen on being naked—my folks had taught me better than that. Even as a child, especially a good Mormon child, I know no good can come from all that “s” stuff—sex, sensuality, seduction.

My Mormon heritage runs deep. More than one hundred and fifty winters ago, my foremothers yoked themselves to the upstart new faith and bravely trudged behind pioneer husbands on the long trek across wind- and snow-driven plains to the valley of the Great Salt Lake.

My entrance to the valley, however, proved less dramatic, although I did arrive in Provo, Utah, naked and crying. That long-ago December day in 1946 brought a Christmas snow that swaddled in white the Brigham Young University campus where both my parents were students.

A year and a half later, a baby brother joined our family, and we moved to Salt Lake City to live “under the shadow of the temple,” as we said in hundreds of family prayers. The answer to one prayer arrived twelve years later when a baby sister showed up to complete our family.

I’m so Mormon, polygamists practically fall off my family tree—from long-ago great-grandparents to present-day cousins. Oh, the stories of polygamy I’ve heard as they trickle down through the generations from foremothers who lived that “divinely” harsh principle. Although the concept of multiple spouses has changed from how Joseph Smith started it, with most of the ramifications now shifted from this life to the next, in Mormon Town, polygamy still remains alive and sticking as a founding principle.



I’m standing in my daddy’s boots in 1948.

Growing up in the complicated doctrinal net called Mormonism, my parents taught me the basics—since I was a special spirit in heaven before I was born on Earth, God sent me to a faithful family of Latter-day Saints during these “last days.”

Ever since the Church's beginning in 1830, the end of the world has loomed prophetically overhead.

Church leaders heaped on the rest—the Garden of Eden was in Jackson County, Missouri, a group of Jews sailed from Jerusalem to the Americas in 600 BC to become the American Indians, and the Mormon male's ultimate reward is to become a god. Damn good news for the men! This god status entitles them to have many wives in heaven—just like their Mormon god. But since I am a woman, my scenario is different. If I'm very good and obey all their rules, my ultimate reward will be to become *one* of those wives—as part of a goddess harem.

Surely that's heritage enough without being loosely related to a fish.



Why in starfish heaven did my father choose a legendary mermaid as my namesake? What possible insights could his little Mormon daughter ever gain from a mermaid? Did those dank waters whisper secrets of mystical wisdom? Share longings of nautical freedom?

Bound to her memory, could my father have tossed me a liberating line of freedom by choosing to name his firstborn daughter Lorelei?