

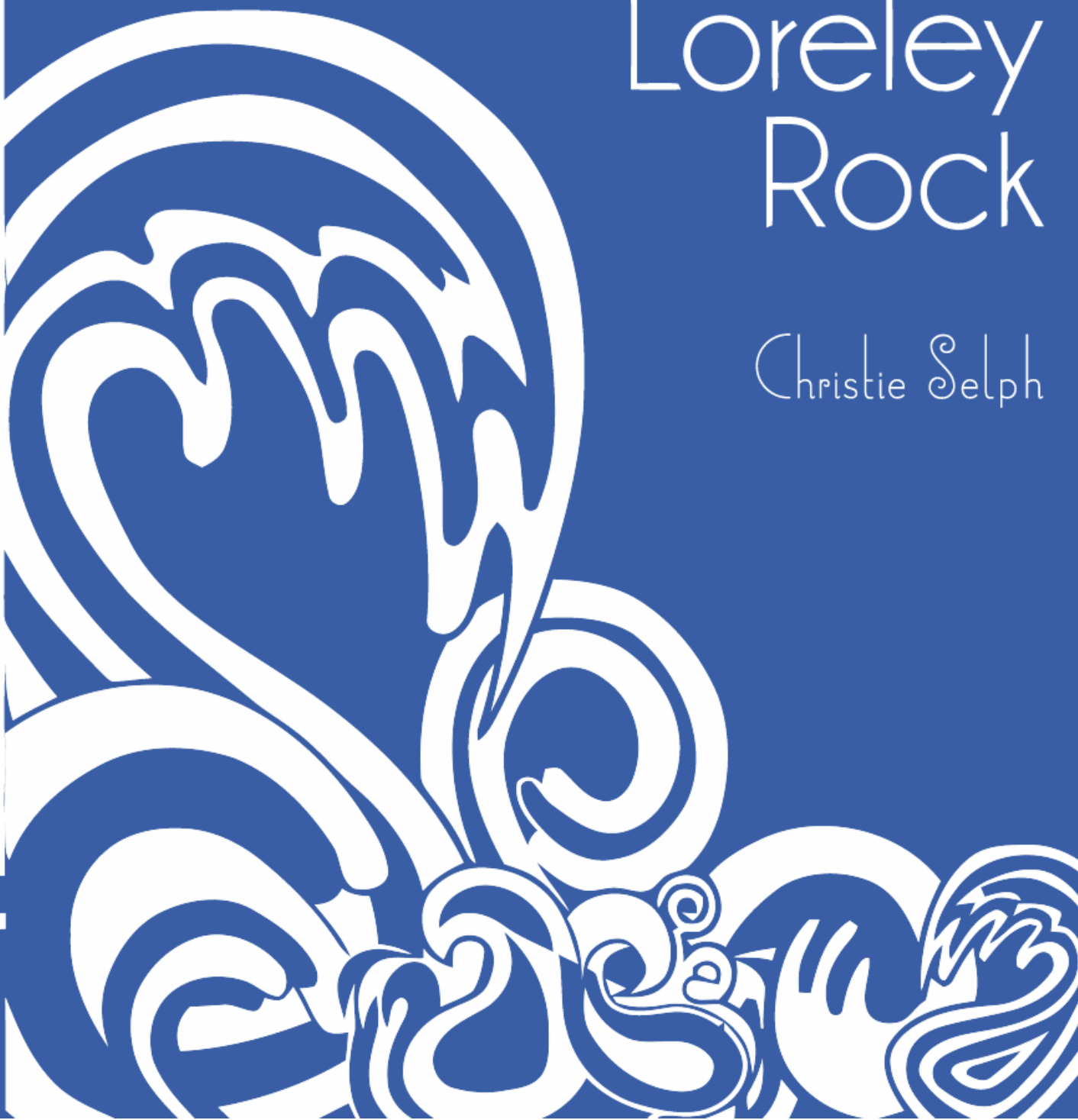
The Mermaid Trilogy

# The Siren of Loreley Rock

Christie Selph

The Siren of Loreley Rock

BOOK 1



The Siren of Loreley Rock/Selph

# The Siren of Loreley Rock

**A novel by Christie Selph**

"News is a rough-draft of history."

Coined perhaps by Alan Barth (1906-1979), a 20th century American journalist and author, well-remembered for his thirty years as a *Washington Post* editorial writer, this sentence was adopted and adapted by Philip L. Graham (1915-1963), a newspaperman who served as publisher and later co-owner of the *Washington Post*.

This book is a work of historical fiction. The events are accurate and the historical figures are real though the dialogue has been imagined by the author.

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## "The Lorelei"

One of Heine's famous poems, "*Die Lorelei*," is based on a German legend of an enchanting, seducing mermaid who lures seamen to their death. Numerous composers, such as Friedrich Silcher and Franz Liszt, have set it to music.

Here is Heine's poem:

*Ich weiss nicht, was soll es bedeuten,  
Dass ich so traurig bin;  
Ein Märchen aus alten Zeiten,  
Das kommt mir nicht aus dem Sinn.  
Die Luft ist kühl, und es dunkelt,  
Und ruhig fließt der Rhein;  
Der Gipfel des Berges funkelt  
Im Abendsonnenschein.  
Die schönste Jungfrau sitzet  
Dort oben wunderbar,  
Ihr goldenes Geschmeide blitzet, Sie kämmt ihr goldenes Haar.  
Sie kämmt es mit goldenem Kamme  
Und singt ein Lied dabei;  
Das hat eine wundersame,  
Gewaltige Melodei.  
Den Schiffer im kleinen Schiffe  
Ergreift es mit wildem Weh;  
Er schaut nicht die Felsenriffe,  
Er schaut nur hinauf in die Höh.  
Ich glaube, die Wellen verschlingen  
Am Ende Schiffer und Kahn;  
Und das hat mit ihrem Singen  
Die Lorelei getan.*

## "The Lorelei"

### **English translation (not always translated literally):**

I don't know what it means  
That I am so sad  
A legend of bygone days  
That I cannot keep out of my mind.

The air is cool and night is coming.  
The calm Rhine courses its way.  
The peak of the mountain dazzles  
With evening's final ray.  
The fairest of maidens is sitting  
Up there, a beautiful delight,  
Her golden jewels are shining,  
She's combing her golden hair.  
She holds a golden comb,  
Singing along, as well  
An enthralling  
And spellbinding melody.  
In his little boat, the boatman  
Is seized by it with a savage woe.  
He does not look upon the rocky ledge  
But rather high up into the heavens.  
I think that the waves will devour  
The boatman and boat in the end  
And this by her song's sheer power  
Fair Loreley has done.

# Part One: The Siren's Song Begins

**Reunion: Washington, DC, 1963**

“I know you’re nervous,” said John. “Don’t worry, the years will...,” he was saying when Lorelei slipped out of the Chevy Impala’s passenger seat.

“Sorry, Johnny,” she said before her steps quickened. “Give me a couple of hours. I have to do this by myself.”

Somehow, she traversed the yards of concrete pavement, never taking her eyes off the tall figure silhouetted in the lobby’s glass. ‘Nervous is an understatement,’ she thought as she felt her legs weaken. A few seconds later, she collapsed into her father’s outstretched arms.

“How I have prayed this day would come,” said Billy, stroking the back of her head. “My life these past eight years without you has been miserable.”

Lorelei did not notice the strands of grey in his black curls or the circles under his equally black eyes. She relished his smell and the strength of his embrace and found comfort in the soothing tone of his voice. All she wanted to know was why? Why did you leave me?

This question drummed in her brain as arm-in-arm they walked to the elevator. Her voice failed her. Instead, she buried her head in his chest, next to his heart, and cried not like an abandoned eight-year-old but with a young woman’s tears of relief and reunion.

Billy opened the credenza in his rather grand, cherry-paneled office overlooking K St., NW in Washington, DC, and pulled out stacks of letters, all marked return-to-sender, and bags filled with unopened parcels.

Kicking an especially large Christmas box across the room, he said, “You won’t need this doll. All my attempts to communicate were intercepted. Your mother thinks she’s doing right by you, but she’s wrong. If you’ll allow me, I’ll try to make some changes.”



“What happened Daddy?” she asked, but before he could answer, Lorelei told him about that awful February night when her mother had said, “Your father won’t be returning this Friday night or any Friday night in the foreseeable future.”

In between sniffles which turned into tears, Lorelei told her father, “She just sat there, eating fish and drinking Mateus just like always except your place at the head of the table was empty. I didn’t know what to think. It was weeks later before she explained how parents who disagree live apart for a while. Holy moly, Daddy! I thought you were dead.”

She looked up from her hands twisting in her lap to see tears tracing her father’s cheeks and moved closer to him on the huge leather sofa, perfectly positioned between two large windows. Instinctively, he put his arm around her, and she snuggled against him as she had done so many times, so many years ago. In her shoulder bag, she found tissues and handed her father some. Blowing together, they sounded like a flock of migrating geese and Lorelei’s giggle lessened the tension, at least for a little while.

“What happened is a long and unpleasant story,” said Billy. “One that pains me deeply with consequences that seemed without remedy until now.”

Billy told her about the trumped-up restraining order and how Anne had convinced the local sheriff that she’d been manhandled, claiming her husband had violently objected to her purchase of the *Leaf*, a nearly defunct weekly newspaper with offices in La Plata. It was the Fifties and though the Rosie Riveters of the Second World War had returned, somewhat reluctantly, to the hearth, Anne loathed domestic duties.

“You would never hit Mother,” said Lorelei.

“Of course not,” he said. “But your mother needed an excuse, for a reason I still don’t completely understand, to get rid of me. Why she didn’t ask me to help with the purchase of the

*Leaf*, and instead went crawling back to your Grandfather Alden, well, I don't understand that either?

Blowing his nose again, then he continued:

“Perhaps you don't know that our courtship and subsequent elopement made me *persona non grata* as far as Alden and Amanda Winthrop were concerned. I understood that Anne needed to prove to her father that she, his only child, was better than the son he'd never sired. But ending our marriage without even trying to salvage it, well that's an extreme example of the seven-year-itch that I don't understand at all!”

Lorelei began to relax. She liked that her father was talking to her like an adult. ‘I'm not his little girl anymore,’ she thought though her pent-up frustration turned her voice shrill.

“Yes, I remember that story and all of Mother's other stories about the Massachusetts Bay Colony – the founder, her famous ancestor John Winthrop, and all her other illusions of grandeur, but that doesn't answer my question. Why didn't you visit me?”

“I'm not trying to avoid your question,” said Billy. “You have the right to be angry, but that's the outcome of this whole disgusting story which pains me the most. I had hoped your mother could abide by our divorce visitation clause, that summers would be ours. She refused to comply and threatened me with a restraining order, which for some unknown reason that old curmudgeon of a judge keeps active, long after that writ should have expired.”

“Mother says he's retiring,” she said.

“Let's hope it's soon,” said Billy. The courts now are more cognizant of the rights of fathers; maybe a new judge will be more understanding. If I had violated the order, then as well as now, I would be disbarred. Every time I tried to bend Anne's iron will, she lashed out. I can't

afford to lose my law license. I know that might sound selfish to you, but there wasn't any other recourse, at least until now."

He did not mention Anne's threatening call before Lorelei's arrival. How Anne knew about their secret meeting, which John had made possible, he had not asked.

He did say to her: "Anne, I have sufficient evidence that proves you are an unfit mother. And the law has become kinder to fathers. Our marriage may have ended, but I am Lorelei's father and I have rights which the courts now respect. Sounds like you've destroyed your relationship with Lorelei. Don't make matters worse. Let Lorelei be or I'll see you in court," and he had hung-up before Anne could respond.

"I know what I'm about to say sounds like a rebellious teenager," and Lorelei confessed the years since his 'disappearance' had been hell. "I'm a straight-A student and Mother says I'm stupid. She claims my school only challenges idiots. Nothing I do is ever good enough and everything I accomplish is ignored. She berates you. If she knew I had a boyfriend, she'd call him a Papist, like Grandfather Alden cursed you, and I'd be grounded forever or who knows what else her sick mind would conjure."

She managed a smile when Billy complimented John and called him, "a very special young man," and thanked him for his hours of sleuthing which had made their reunion possible.

"He told me you're not allowed to make long distance phone calls so I understand why you could never find me."

When he asked how anyone could question the quality of education at Sacred Heart, a parochial school on the outskirts of La Plata in Southern Maryland, Lorelei explained her mother had transferred her in ninth grade to La Plata, a public school perched high on a hill overlooking the town's main street.

“I’ll be a senior, next fall,” she said. “The kids in my academic class are good students. We challenge each other. I’m one of five Merit Scholarship finalists though I don’t think I’ll win. One of my classmates is a real genius. I know good ole La Plata High is a far cry from those Jesuit academies, like your alma mater Boston College High, or Johnny’s Gonzaga, but I think I’m getting a decent education.”

She told him about cheerleading, singing in the Glee Club, and writing for the school’s newspaper, the *Echo*.

“I think I’d like to be a journalist when I grow up,” said Lorelei, “but Mother doesn’t even look at my articles. She drives me most mornings to school and when I show her a new article, she just slings the paper in the back seat of the Buick and says nothing. Come fall, I’ll be editor.”

Now, it was Billy’s turn to manage a smile. “That’s wonderful me darlin’ daughter. I have missed so much of your life.”

Then both of them teared up, again, and Lorelei’s moss green eyes plumbed his black ones and a comfortable silence enveloped them. When Lorelei mentioned her sister, Rosemary in Boston, the look of shock on her father’s face silenced them, again.

“You don’t know?” she said, looking at him directly in the eye.

Billy lowered his head. She heard his guttural denial.

“Oh Daddy, I just assumed, or else I wouldn’t have dropped this bomb so casually. Mother always claimed my sister was a gift from you. Somehow, I don’t think she appreciated your present.”

“Why is she in Boston?” asked Billy.

“She’s been there for three years with Mother’s parents. Mother told Grandmother Amanda she didn’t want her to go to school with ‘pickaninnies who have scabies.’ I overheard her talking with Grandmother on the phone. I’m not certain what Mother meant, but Rosemary goes to a Montessori school and lives with them.

“Really?” said Billy. “Pickaninnies is an ugly word for black children. Not to get all legal however I think your mother was referring to the Supreme Court decision, *Brown v Board of Education* which mandated the integration of public schools. Do you have any black students in your class?”

“Not yet,” said Lorelei, “but a lot of parents are worried. I don’t know why it’s such a big deal. I played with the tenant farmer’s kids when I was little. They seemed fine to me, but Mother put a stop to that, too.

“What else has she stopped?”

“Well, I don’t go to our church anymore.”

“No more St. Ignatius, that beautiful old stone church overlooking the Port Tobacco River?”

“Nope. Christ Church in Wayside. Guess I’m an Episcopalian, now.”

Billy laughed and made a quip about nothing wrong with being a “second stringer,” a reference which befuddled Lorelei however before she could question him, Billy said, “Your mother and I never agreed on religion. Is there a Puritan meeting house yet in Charles County?”

“I don’t think so,” said Lorelei. “I don’t think Mother follows her faith.”

“Well that hasn’t changed,” he said.

“Her business partner, Larry Milligan, is sort of like me,” said Lorelei. “He’s half-Irish with a Puritan mother from Boston. Strange, don’t you think? I don’t believe he goes to

meetings, either. You know how Catholic Maryland is. All that history about religious freedom and stuff.”

Knowing more about Anne’s relationship with Larry Milligan from his conversations with John than he cared to admit, Billy changed the subject and returned to Rosemary, asking Lorelei whom her sister resembled.

Lorelei hedged – ‘Dear Lord,’ she prayed silently, ‘help me contain my acid tongue’— and answered, “Not much like anyone except she has Mother’s blue eyes.”

Fingering the journal, she had started writing when she was eleven, which she always carried in her purse for fear her mother would ransack her bedroom and find it, Lorelei remembered searching through *Dado* Liam’s memorabilia stored in the attic, searching for clues as to why Rosemary looked so different.

Amongst her paternal grandfather’s dog-eared, black and white photos of skinny *colleens* in tattered gingham, several seemed to be redheads like her but no blondes. The same proved true in her mother’s Winthrop family album. Not a ski-jump nose in sight, just lots of prim and proper Back Bay Bostonians filled with Puritan disdain and prominent probosces.

Inside her journal was a faded black and white photo of her father in full piper’s regalia, the only picture she had found of him anywhere in her Dutch Colonial home atop a knoll on Horsehead Manor, the farm Billy had purchased before she had started elementary school. To protect the fragile photograph, she had wrapped it in Saran Wrap and taped the edges.

Lorelei could not remember how many times she had clutched that picture, stifling tears, trying to rekindle her memories. This keepsake had been the only remnant of a past which until last night she thought had been lost forever. With great care, she removed the Scotch tape and handed it to her father.

“Now that’s a memory,” laughed Billy. “Where did find this?”

“In a box of *Dado* Liam and *Mamo* Mary Laurie’s things in an attic box marked, South Boston. I took the *shillelagh*, too. Did I pronounce that word correctly?”

“Sure did, *mo stór*,” said Billy, using his Gaelic grandfather’s term of endearment. “I see your mind’s still as fine as Irish mist,” he laughed. “Your mother took that picture of me. St. Paddy’s Day, 1946. All the Hartes since the ancient Kings of Tara have been pipers. Now that’s quite a story....”

The Empire clock on his office mantle, chiming noon, interrupted him.

“Holy crap!” she said, springing from the sofa. “I told John a couple of hours and we’ve been yakking more than three.”

“Are you hungry?” he asked as she pushed against his office door.

“Starving!”

Billy called and made luncheon reservations at O’Donnell’s Seafood Grill, around the corner from the White House. Lorelei found John in the lobby engrossed in the morning newspaper. The expression on her face said everything.

They embraced and he whispered, “Magic – I told you the years would disappear like magic or at least that’s what I was trying to say when you hopped out of the car.”

The rest of the afternoon, Lorelei floated in a fantasy world wedged between two pairs of dancing dark eyes, all looking at her with love, and huge smiles, grins even, with laughter bubbling like fizzy water. She didn’t know whether to hold hands with John or lean against her father whose arm was draped behind her on the banquette so she switched back and forth, telling them she needed two anchors so she wouldn’t sail away “On the Good Ship Lollipop.”

When Billy announced he had recently married a beautiful woman named Sylvie, Lorelei could tell how happy he was, how happy he must be. ‘He never would have found such happiness with Mother,’ she thought.

They all laughed when Billy described Sylvie as “the other red-haired woman in my life. Whoops, that’s three. I nearly forgot *Mamo* Mary Laurie.”

The happiness in Lorelei’s eyes reflected the contentment in her soul. Meeting John had given her love and sanctuary; reuniting with her father made her ecstatic. She looked at them both through more adult eyes and she loved what she saw.

The grilled, back-fin cakes tasted like the crabs had been swimming that morning in the Chesapeake Bay. Their conversation flowed as rapidly as the hot fudge melted their Breyers ice cream. Over coffee, Billy addressed the last concern which nagged Lorelei.

“I’ll call your mother when I get back to the office. No more waiting, I promise.”

“You know, Daddy, Mother doesn’t care if people know about Larry Milligan. They’re hardly discreet. I confronted her a couple of times, but she just told me to shut up and mind my own business.”

“I know,” said Billy. “John has explained how she’s perceived in the county. She might not care, but a judge would.”

He explained how the law had become friendlier to fathers and that Anne’s protracted violation of his visitation rights jeopardized their settlement agreement.

“Mother doesn’t care about me, much less where I live.”

“Maybe so, I’m sorry to say, but she does care about the thirty-thousand I left in trust for you.”

Lorelei’s eyes widened like an owl’s with amazement.



Straight after graduating *summa cum laude* from Georgetown Law, Billy and two of his equally gifted classmates had hung out their shingle. Hogan, Arnold, and Harte, using Alan Arnold's Jewish contacts, had been an overnight success. Billy's forte was international law and lobbying.

Lorelei was speechless, at least for a few seconds. Wondering if the money to purchase Anne's second newspaper, the *Beacon*, in St. Mary's County was in part hers, she told her father. He promised to demand an accounting.

"What if...," Lorelei started to say, but her father stopped her.

"No more worries, me darlin' daughter. People claim I'm a very good lawyer. I will handle everything from this point forward. Nothing will keep us apart ever again."

"I hope so, Daddy. I hope we can erase all those lost years."

Then Lorelei took a leap of faith, a huge risk of revelation most teenagers would never have considered much less consummated. She handed him her journal.

I want you to know whom I have become," she said, and once more they embraced. The look of astonishment on her father's face made her heart soar.

"I will treasure your thoughts and read with an open mind," he told her.

"I wish we could have done this sooner," Lorelei said to John on the drive home.

"Sometimes you can't act until the time's right," and he hummed a few bars from Pete Seeger's "Turn! Turn! Turn!"

She turned on the radio. They listened to Dick Cerri's folk music program on WAVA-FM and sang together when Cerri played one of their favorite songs. John's clear tenor and her

soprano harmonized as she sang the refrain to Woody Guthrie's "This Land is Your Land." She squeezed his hand and thanked him again for making their reunion possible.

On an adrenalin high since the night before when John had revealed her father's whereabouts, the hum of the Chevy's tires against the asphalt lulled her and she leaned against him and closed her eyes. In a semi-conscious rem, half-awake, half-asleep, her mind, for some perverse reason, focused on her mother. Whether the euphoria of reuniting with her father was waning or the reality of her mother was waxing, she couldn't shake herself free.

All of Anne's past atrocities bloomed like a red tide. Her memories unfolded – Anne punishing her for wearing her favorite green party dress too many times; that awful night when the prom escort her mother had selected when she was twelve and his tongue thrust down her throat and Anne's gall, accusing her of being a seductress instead of chastising him; the inanity of being told she was stupid and her sister Rosemary, eight years her junior, was a genius – these incidents may seem innocuous to an adult, but to a young girl the consequences were devastating.

When your own mother will not support you, what is a girl to think? All Lorelei believed was that her mother did not love her and since it was her fault, year after year, Lorelei tried harder.

Anne's stinging words, her indifference, the feeling that she lived on one planet and her mother lived on another had turned Lorelei's insecurities into a psychosis. Except for John's love and encouragement and without his sanctuary, Lorelei believed she would have had a mental breakdown. Somewhere deep within herself, Lorelei found the courage to face her mother and steeled herself for the inevitable confrontation. The only blemish on that remarkable day was her mother's reception.

“Do you want me to come in with you?” asked John as he braked in front of her house.

“No, my love. Your presence will prolong the horror. I’m sorry our last night together has to end like this.”

She leaned towards him and they exchanged a passionate kiss filled with longing and resignation. Before closing the door, she blew him a kiss then turned abruptly to hid her tears and assumed a defiant face as she strode toward the back-porch steps. Lorelei braced herself. She saw her mother through the glass panels and unlatched the backdoor.

As sarcastically as possible, she said, “Good evening, Mother. Shall the games begin?”

Anne Forth Winthrop Harte needed no invitation.

“You’re an ungrateful daughter and a brazen hussy. I know you’re screwing that guy,” said Anne, pounding her fist on the kitchen table. She took a swig of her scotch and water – “Nothing will change. I don’t give a damn what Billy says. When you’re in my house, you will do as I say.”

Lorelei followed her father’s advice and ignored Anne. She had no idea why her mother was so preoccupied with her sex life. She didn’t care because she knew it would happen soon – ‘Well 251 days from now,’ she reminded herself, well aware that Harvard University and John’s Reserve Officers’ Training Corp (ROTC) scholarship commitments came first.

John had told her the bad news the night before, the bad news that they would be apart until next Christmas. If her mother would allow her any freedom at all, perhaps Lorelei could visit him on campus. ‘That will never happen,’ she told herself. Then, she allowed herself to feel smug. ‘At least, she never knew about John until now,’ and she congratulated herself for keeping such a secret for two years in such a small town.

She fantasized about making love with him, how it would feel, feeling the desire when their mouths met and their bodies meshed. She knew how much he wanted her and how much she wanted him. She remembered the ache when their passion became too great and he forced himself to push her away.

Suddenly, she burst into song and sang Philip's refrain to "Sea of Love." After years of floundering, the siren finally had found her rock or at least that's what Lorelei told herself.

For the remaining two months of her junior year, Lorelei drove her father's old, red MG to school. The 1948 Dodge sports coupe, which resembled a pregnant turtle, never materialized as her grandmother had promised. She spent weekends with her father, traveling in the limo he sent because Billy felt she lacked the experience to navigate city traffic.

He even paid for a separate phone line which Lorelei could use as she wished, making her one of the first people in more rural Charles County to have a private line.

The behavior of Lorelei's sister turned more bizarre – Rosemary wouldn't talk with her at all. Last year had been difficult enough, but now, she refused to come to the phone. Grandmother Amanda wasn't any help. Lorelei wondered if her mother had poisoned her mind or whether Rosemary was jealous of her relationship with their father.

Anne dismissed her concerns – "She's a little girl, Lorelei. What in the hell can you talk about when you're eight years older than she?"

"How would you know, Mother? All you do is ask her about school, and a minute later, you're yakking with Grandmother. Unless I'm wrong, you haven't visited her since last summer."

"Why would you care? You said you were glad she was going to Boston so she didn't have to suffer me."

“Because she’s my sister and my little sister deserves better.”

Lorelei fled to the sanctuary of her bedroom before she blurted out what she really wanted to say – “What a narcissistic bitch,” she laughed as she used narcissistic in a sentence for her English homework. For years, Lorelei had chastised herself about not liking her mother, calling her feelings unnatural, but recently, she had begun to believe her mother didn’t deserve to be liked much less loved. Too much had happened.

“Should I talk with Daddy?” she asked John on their first, long-distance call on her new phone. “I saw pictures of her inside a letter Grandmother Amanda sent this past Christmas. Rosemary still doesn’t look like anyone in the family. My gut tells me she’s not Daddy’s daughter.

“Does he pay child support?” he asked.

“No, I wouldn’t think so. At our reunion, I mentioned Rosemary to Daddy and he was dumbfounded. I remember Mother calling her a ‘gift from your father,’ but she would have demanded money if Rosemary were his. She must be afraid of a blood test.”

Those paternity tests are about ninety-five percent accurate,” he said. “I trust your gut, but you should wait. Let me snoop around, first.”

“I can’t believe we’re talking on a phone,” she said. “I don’t have to worry about Mrs. Rice or Old Lady Barbour listening in, much less Mother. I don’t know what Daddy said to her or what threats he made, but there’s none of her normal shenanigans.”

“Yeah, and after two years, we no longer have to lurk in the shadows or meet at the end of your road.”

There was a certain perversity in being a Maryland teenager in 1963. Statutory rape ended when a girl turned sixteen; the age of majority began at eighteen, which meant you could

marry, drink beer, smoke, and die for your country. However, you could not vote, consume spirits, or enter into contracts until you turned twenty-one.

The real conundrum for a girl occurred between sixteen and eighteen. The reality of this conundrum was her mother's refusal to allow her to date until she was sixteen. 'Thank god, I've passed that milestone,' Lorelei told herself.

A few days later, John called Lorelei with some news about Rosemary.

"You did what!" exclaimed Lorelei.

"Being a successful spy is difficult when you're trying to uncover dirt on a banker with a top-echelon name," said John. "I wracked my brains. I couldn't claim to be an FBI agent, vetting Alden Winthrop's background, or a loan officer checking local businesses for debts so I did the next best thing," and then he laughed, a conspiratorial laugh that piqued her curiosity.

"I borrowed a car from one of my fraternity brothers and followed your sister. Like you said, she attends a Montessori school and a driver picks her up every morning. She's well-dressed and looks OK, but she's the saddest little girl I've ever seen. She sits by herself at recess and, in the three days I tailed her, I never saw her smile."

John paused and allowed the first part sink in. Then he continued before Lorelei could interrupt.

"So yesterday, I was parked on their street and heard the ice cream truck. Your grandmother brought your sister out of the house, which by the way is a big turn-of-the-century brownstone, and bought her a vanilla cone. Even then, she didn't smile. A light-bulb went off in my head. I bought a cone and pumped the ice cream guy for information."

"He wasn't a kid so I gave some credence to what he said: 'They're strange birds, the Winthrops. As hard as I've tried, I can't get that little girl to smile much less talk to me. Finally,

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a couple of weeks back, she looks at me and says, all pouty and everything, that her grandfather didn't allow her to talk to men. I mean, I understand why, but Holy Moses, you can at least say please and thank-you.”

“That’s remarkable,” said Lorelei.

“Then I had another idea,” he explained. “One of my frat brothers makes fake ID’s so the bars will serve us. He forged me a Child Protective Services card. I wore a suit and walked into her school like I owned the place. I have to admit, Lorelei, I was nervous, but I flashed that card and demanded to see her teacher.

“Wow! That takes courage. Thank you, Johnny for being so brave.”

“In less than five-minutes, a young woman, who turns out to be her teacher, emerged from a classroom down the hall. I assumed by the expression on her face that she had concerns about Rosemary, so I just ran with it and asked her, ‘So you also believe there’s been some form of abuse? I’m following up on a call we received in our office.’ Fuck-me, you couldn’t turn her off!”

“ She talked about Rosemary being sullen, not playing with the other kids, and on and on. She told me, ‘I checked her for physical abuse several time but found nothing,’ and then she asked, ‘Did your caller suggest something else?’ I gave her one of my little nods and a knowing glance and told her I couldn’t divulge confidential information. Then she dropped a real bomb – ‘I hope you’ll continue your investigation because I suspect something is really wrong.’”

“Oh, no!” said Lorelei. “Should we tell Daddy?”

“I don’t know. She goes by the name of Harte, but maybe you should check the birth certificate filed in the county courthouse, first.”

“The courthouse? Why?”

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“If your father’s not on her birth certificate, his hands are tied,” said John.

“The one in La Plata?” asked Lorelei.

“Yes, that one.”



# Part Two: Tears Turn to Stone

### **Life in the Fast Lane: Summer, 1963.**

Lorelei absolutely adored the second redhead in her father's life. Sylvie was everything her mother was not. A Frenchwoman who had abandoned her diplomatic career to marry her father, she was a sophisticated fireball who spoke four languages and was a graduate of the Sorbonne. As per her parents' original divorce decree, Lorelei spent the summer with them in their Georgetown townhouse, right next to Dumbarton Oaks in the northwest section of Washington, DC. How her father had accomplished this, Lorelei had no idea. 'He must be a great lawyer,' she thought.

At the *Leaf*, she graduated from the print shop to the proofreading cubicle.

All her father had said was, "Your job at the paper starts next week. Don't worry, I've taken care of your mother." No amount of pleading would force Billy to divulge his tactics – "All will be known in due time," he had promised.

Disappointed at being denied a rookie reporter's position, Lorelei, in her free time, ventured to St. Mary's County, one of the four Southern Maryland counties adjacent to Charles.

In Leonardtown, St. Mary's county seat, Anne and Larry had bought a nearly defunct weekly, dwarfed by the *Enterprise's* fifteen times larger circulation. *The St. Mary's Beacon* had fewer subscribers than when Anne had purchased the *Leaf* from Old Man Hayden. In her mind, she conjured Hayden's sotted image, 'thin as a dime and not worth a nickel of silver,' she thought. Lorelei took pictures and wrote fluff articles about the humane society and the garden club – little bits and pieces which appeared in the community section. Neither Anne nor Larry knew some of the articles published in the *Beacon* were hers, but their most recent editor, somewhat sober and a little on the lazy side, did.

Behind her mother's back, Lorelei worked hard honing her journalism skills. It hadn't taken the leggy teenager too long to notice how men stared at her; how the men stared at her and not her mother's bulging breasts and shapely games, balancing on Ferragamo stilettos.

'I can't believe she treats me like shit because she's jealous of me,' she thought. Interviewing the local garden club president, she remembered the grilling she had given John on their first, illicit date at the La Plata Diner when she was fourteen and he was eighteen and laughed again about his comparing her interview to being grilled like a hamburger.

'That note he left on the bleachers while we were cheering at half-time was really romantic,' she thought. When she wasn't working on an article or proofreading the work of others, she searched the records in St. Mary's courthouse, a near duplicate of the cupola-topped edifice in La Plata, for a bill-of-sale or a contract transferring the *Beacon's* ownership. No paperwork existed.

'I shouldn't complain,' she told herself. 'I'm one for one.' Her search of the birth records in Charles County showed Harte had been appended to Rosemary Amanda Winthrop with her father's name listed on the certificate. She kept these revelations to herself and waited.

Meanwhile, John spent the entire summer of 1963 playing war games in the Mediterranean aboard the USS Intrepid, an aging but storied aircraft carrier built during World War Two. These summer deployments were required under the terms of his scholarship. More than ninety days had passed since Lorelei had seen him and they had returned to letter writing.

In his first letter from the ship, he wrote:

*This sweatbox is a hell-hole. I've decided to serve my mandatory four years after Harvard in the Marines. I miss you more than words can express. You should see my calendar with all the X's on it. The guys rib me, but they shut the hell up when I show them your picture....*

He also sent her a picture. He looked thin and pale from hours in the boiler room, like an Auschwitz survivor, but Lorelei didn't tell him that. Often that summer, she wondered how she would survive without him, but survive she did. Billy and Sylvie took the edge off her grief.

With the new school year only a few weeks away, she started thinking that she would never make it to graduation if she stayed with her mother. The thought of leaving Washington, DC saddened her. She loved the buzz of the city; she loved that with her father and stepmother she felt she had a family. Billy, however, persuaded her that not staying with Anne on the farm would jeopardize his tenuous truce with her.

"Trust me," he said. "After your seventeenth birthday next March and before you go to college, I promise all will be revealed and resolved."

That's when Lorelei broke her silence and told him about Rosemary's last name and not finding a bill of sale for the *Beacon*. Billy didn't blink.

"I'm working on that," was all he would say. "You know me darlin' daughter, naming you was the first of our many arguments. Anne wanted to call you Amanda after her mother, but I refused. Your grandmother's wimpier than Caspar Milquetoast and that first time I saw you, all screaming with your little fists bunched up ready for battle, I knew you weren't an Amanda.

"So how did you settle on Lorelei?"

"Compromise, me darlin'. Compromise. Lorelei Brennan Winthrop Harte, I believe that was the first and only time your mother ever compromised with me."

William Brennan Harte never had shown her the pictures from his army days when he was a dashing young captain committed to doing his part against the Germans. And he certainly hadn't shown her those provocative photos with his arm draped over the shoulder of a buxom *liebchen* on the banks of the Rhine in front of Loreley Rock. Nor had he pulled up his shirt and

displayed his shrapnel scars. Instead he told her about the myth of Loreley Rock and gave her a copy of Heine's poem, "Die Lorelei," both in the original German and the English translation.

"That day you were born," said Billy, "I looked into those beautiful eyes of yours and I was captivated. Captivated like the sailors by the Loreley maiden's enchanting song. That's why I named you Lorelei."

"Oh Daddy! I think we need a shovel."

Billy chuckled and then he launched into another of his favorite stories which he feared she had forgotten.

"The Brennans on my mother's side kissed St. Patrick's hand and accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior."

But Lorelei interrupted him, "Have you ever been back to the land of our ancestors? I remember your promise. Do you remember that day we walked Snow and Honeyboy back to the stables? You promised me I'd see a real thatched cottage."

"Not to the Irish Republic," he said. "Someday soon..." and his voice trailed off.

"However, I'm going to mass tomorrow. Want to go with Sylvie and me?"

"I hope I haven't forgotten the service like I've forgotten how to play that tin whistle you gave me when I was little."

"It's like riding a bicycle, me darlin'. Besides, it's in English."

"What?" she asked, her eyebrows raising like question marks.

"Mass, me silly darlin'! There's no more Latin Tridentine liturgy. The Irish Catholics changed all of that in March, 1965. If memory serves it was on your birthday. Quite an ironic present, don't you think?"

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