



# South Tyrol – Legends of the Dolomites

## The Mermaid of Lake Karersee

The surface of the water at Lake Karersee in Eggental Valley shines in all colours: from blue and green to golden yellow and red. Many believe that precious stones lying at the bottom of the lake are what make it so colourful. But this belief is incorrect: one observes in Lake Karersee not the colours of precious stones, you see, but the colours of the rainbow. The Dirlinger people referred to the events, which are said to have taken place in the earliest age of the Dirlinger people:

There lived in Lake Karersee a beautiful mermaid, who often sat on the shore and sang. When anyone came near, she would immediately dive under the water. In the forest below the Latemar Mountains, there lived an evil wizard. He had seen the mermaid once • and decided that she should be his.

He went to the lake to see the mermaid every single day, but she always disappeared into the water at the sight of him. Sometimes, this would make him so furious that he would conjure a storm behind the Latemar Mountains and fling thunderbolts down into the lake. The mermaid only laughed about this, though. So he began to try other approaches. One time, he used his magic powers to turn himself into an otter. He sneaked up on the mermaid. The songbirds had warned the mermaid in advance, though, and she immediately dived under the water. The wizard jumped after her but could not catch her • because a mermaid is faster than an otter.

One day, the wizard, full of grief, climbed up the Rosengarten Massif, where there lived a striona, a powerful witch. He told her about his efforts. The witch laughed at him, but she told him that he had already consulted with two other wizards but they also did not have the power to help him. Then the witch gave him some advice: "The mermaid has never seen a rainbow. Build a beautiful rainbow on the Latemar Towers, and let it dip its feet in the surface of Lake Karersee. When the mermaid sees the rainbow, she will grow curious and will want to know what it is. In the meantime, you will transform yourself into an old merchant with a long white beard and a sack full of gold bracelets and sequins on his back. In this way, you will be able to approach the shore of the lake confidently and, seemingly, with no ulterior motive. Then, cut off a piece of the rainbow and say to yourself that this is a precious fabric from which one can make jewels of air. Put it in your bag but let gold and sequins fall out, out as if by accident. The mermaid, who does not know of such things, will become curious and start a conversation with you. You will have to stay completely calm, and tell her about the princesses who have ordered jewels of air from you. Lastly, tell her that you have all sorts of jewels with you because you are a merchant, and invite her to come and see your wares. Believe me, she will come to you."

The wizard climbed up the Latemar Towers that very same day, and created a beautiful rainbow over the forest that went all the way down to Lake Karersee. The mermaid swam up immediately to look at the beautiful colours. When the wizard saw this from above, he believed he could already be certain that his trick would work and ran down below the forest. He was so excited, though, that he forgot to take the form of a merchant. As he neared the shore, the mermaid heard his approach, recognised him, and dove underwater.

The wizard went wild with rage. He tore out trees and tossed boulders around. Then he grabbed the rainbow and threw it into the lake. Finally, he went into the rocks and never allowed himself to look out again.

The rainbow melted away in the water, and its colours spread out on the lake surface. So it is that the surface of the water at Lake Karersee shimmers in such wonderful colours: it's not the colour of the water, but the colours of the rainbow that float on the surface of the lake.

Source: Monika Thalmann (2011): loosely based on Dolomitensagen (Legends of the Dolomites) by Karl Felix Wolff, Tyrolia Press, Innsbruck, 1989, page 113; translation Cassandra Han Viti.