

# sirens

*by* Jerry Ratch

I know what that coast was like, where you went. A coarse country filled with malodorous women that sang from the shores. Groups of nine stripped to the waist. Some with braids hanging down their back. Garden beauties. Visual porticos, with their floral organs on display. Always fatal, in blouses, or without.

They are so dangerous. I should have warned you. They're like a delicate lace that barely mentions the wrist. And always near their mouths, the one barren singing syllable that holds the soul like a faint candle. Nitrogen freshens their lucent skin. Yes, let them swindle their flesh and veins until middle age takes hold of them by the throat. Let them try to hold the lace of their breath inside until they spill their flesh like the rest of us.

The eldest among us may lean on their innards and sip the chill fire of their own veins, but not you. You did not swindle, cheat, or curse your youth. You did not dare cover the creases around your eyes with the false age of memory. You did not sleep on the beaches waiting for the return of your youth. You sailed outward over the boiling sea with those women singing from the rocks, stripped to the waist, wherever you wandered. Their bodies half submerged so they would not reveal the dangers that surrounded your heart.

