

But rigid she stood and he raised her chin.
"Still jealous of water?" he teased.
"Of course. If not husband, then bastard son.
And you'll never forsake your kin."

He turned her squarely to protest,
"I'm telling you, girl, I'm free.
Unlike some men, I'm not obsessed--
Except by your sorcery."

"And how many heads have you beguiled
With pirate's mouth and mahogany chest?"
"Far fewer than you with the lift of your lip
And the up-tilt of your breast!"

"Oh sailor, go follow the farthest tern,
My father invented your creed.
He lured my mother out there where she died.
I know all about your breed.

"And mistress, sister, mother, nymph,
She'll claim you quarry yet.
She'll pull you down on her altar rocks
Where skulls like yours are set.

"With rotting ropes and coral beads
She'll weave your mossy shroud.
And blazon your bones with turtle dung,
And crown your grave with weeds.

"You'd bring me squid and a stillborn child
With your nets and sails to mend,
And serpent horizons of swallowed stars,
But my cage would never bend.

"You talk about flowers and gems down deep,
All mine if I'll be your bride.
It's slimy sand and chains of kelp,
Shell-cuts on my shins in the tide.

"You offer rats, hardtack and rust,
A drunken lamp, a creaking floor,
The hidden claws of the lurking reef,
And that green eternal door.