THE RIDDLES OF THE SIRENS

WALTER SHEDLOFSKY
Saint Louis, Missouri

Corafan, pseudo-poet and mock court jester, hesitated before he entered the king's garden. The riddle was the best he had constructed to date, but he had doubts that the king would solve it. Lately, King Mustapha (seven subsequent irrelevant names) Ferucil had not been pleased and one more displeasure could mean dismissal.

The heat of the desert gave way to the soothing chill of the air-conditioned garden. On a wicker chair sat King Ferucil flanked by his three daughters. They had been born on the same day to three of his eight wives, and to mark the coincidence, King Ferucil, with a wry sense of humor, had named them Portosa, Tholco and Alchessi.

"What do you have for us today, Corafan?" King Ferucil stroked his grayish moustache and goatee. "I hope it is better than yesterday's riddle. What was it?"

"Solomon had a thousand wives and woes;
Tell me, was he foolish or was he wise?"

"No need for Corafan to answer that, father," said Portosa, brown eyes cryptic above her white veil. "How can a man be wise when he has more than one wife?"

"How true, daughter."

"I hope you like my new riddle, your majesty. As you directed, it is risque without being vulgar. In fact, there are three riddles." Corafan handed a typed enigma to King Ferucil and a copy to Portosa:

Cryptic secret, ancient lore cloaks truth to her grand motto:
Hapless plight, myth's quaint siren cast dark spell as rapt fine swarm amused, witch watched each fool turn to swine form.
Mocking lecher, spurring unsated whore doomed giant's strength, lewd Passions meted, shorn fool lost great prowess as strained length strewed ...
Impulse modern, torrid miss writthes (each fool, like Cyril, vies);
Obsessed sense, omen taunts quest for proper virile size.
Needling slave, laughter follows contempt to "Kneel, Prince, dance, lout."
Mortified idol, anxious to whet lust, finds in lance doubt.
Anguish hollow, nightly miss seeks peace in thrust or spasm gray;
Never satiated, captive burns on in orgasm spray.
Yearning sharp, echoes constantly her "in-demand" grotto.

Corafan mused as King Ferucil read the verse-riddle. The king, a short man with graying black hair, ruled his minuscule kingdom with a stern hand. Oittam had three oil wells and the black gold was sufficient to provide for his eight wives and numerous children. Portosa read the riddle and passed Tholco another skein as she continued to knit. Tholco, her blue eyes unwinking above her red veil, glanced at the riddle as Portosa held it in front of her face. Alchessi, her green eyes flashing above her black veil, snipped a loose thread from Tholco's fabric and read the riddle as well.

"Well, Corafan, what is your first riddle?" the king asked.

"What is the eternal nature of all sirens?"

"Don't frown, father," Portosa said. Initially and thirdly, it is quite evident that you should see the sentence of five words. As Corafan said it is risque but not too vulgar."

"Yes, daughter, I can see." However, he did not recite the sentence. "What is the second riddle?"

"Truly, father," Tholco interrupted as the king continued to study the verse, "it is as evident as the first. See how the one word nestles beside the last three words. Also it is an amalgam of the first two words." Her incessant fingers knit another three rows as she spoke.

The spaniel-brown eyes of King Ferucil regarded his daughter. "Ah, yes, now I see. And the third riddle, Corafan?"

"What are the names of two of the most famous sirens?"

"Surely, father," Alchessi said after a long silence, "you should recognize them. One is from Greek legend, the other from the Bible."

"The Koran is my instruction. However, if you say it is evident, then it is clear to my vision."

"Snip off the last loose strand, sister Alchessi. The tapestry and the fate of Corafan are completed. I hope you have found the answers to the three riddles."