

A PRAYER TO VENUS.

MARVELLOUS Venus, listen, please,
For all comes back to me again,
While in the limes the pilfering bees
Hum, as once did each suburb-lane
Where loitered idle mercenaries.

For thou wast very good to me
Long since when war was in the land
And with loud quarrels soldiery
Made it unsafe for girls to stand
Changing their chatter fair and free.

Then was I precious in all eyes ;
And to thine own men would compare
Her charms, who, with a prim disguise
Of glee that knew they needs must stare,
Noticed no jot their courtesies.

For one, my lover recognized,
I fancied no neglect too much,
And overweening tantalized
Him, till my sister's hand would touch
Mine, pitying so where I despised.

We slept in one room, she and I
With cousin Portia, and they had
The double-bed ; for I would lie
Distant, but desperately sad,
Upon a pallet separately.

How oft, disdainingly friendly chat,
I stripped apart and slipped to bed—
A queen who could not stoop to that—
Whose heart, dead for each 'Dear' they said,
With every kiss went pit-a-pat.

Between chill sheets I lay and ached,
And heard their twin breaths tuned to sleep ;
Nor might my longing's thirst be slaked
By tears which crossed my cheeks, in deep
Self-pity hushed for fear they waked.

Past cornice pillarets I watched
The moon's proud progress, till I rose
And slow the lattice-door unlatched :
The lamp shook, but I kept it close
Lest from their dreams they should be snatched.

When I looked forth, all—all was white,
The up-hill fields, the well-worn road ;
Clover with scent had filled the night ;
Though far Vesuvius' crater glowed,
Hay-cocks seemed snow in that wan light.

Nor thought I if, nigh yon fierce glare,
Watching the wild spark fly the flame,
Thou, wrapped at full length in thy hair,
Musedst how many maids, who came
To no good end of love, there were.

All wintry—save one leafy mass
A gust left fondling, to escape,
Kiss my feet cold as in mown-grass
Dead flowers, and thence from heel to nape,
Estranging skin and gown, to pass.

“The moon's is sheer attractiveness”
I thought “—Gives light but doth not love :
Beauty was meant, may be, to bless ;
But can it e'er be blessed enough ?
Day's is such spend-thrift kindness :—

Swallows with grace, from hammock-huts
Cemented neatly to the wall,
Plunge through light, where the pigeon struts,
As gem-like plumes could never fall.—
Sleep on mere prettiness Night shuts,

Nor brooks a bird her realm serene ;
'Twixt mirror-waters and the moon
No forward females intervene,
Nor lass nor lad with lilted tune
Vexes complacence in their queen.”

I closed the shutter, and then turned
With face which, like the moon come close,
Wan from my mirror vaguely yearned ;
Then screamed with bare foot on a rose—
His gift which last eve had been spurned.

They woke—I leapt back into bed :
They stared about still dazed with dreams.
“ Ah, did you hear it too ? ” I said,
Feigning to wake at mine own screams,
Squeezing my smarting foot which bled.

At first we listened breathing hard,
Then talked ten minutes at the most ;
They guessed 'twas some cat in the yard,
But I was sure it was a ghost :
Their dreams were very little marred.

I learned, while they new slumber drank,
My heart had found a voice which wooed
Pillows to life : as drowsed I sank,
Mine seemed plump roosting doves who cooed,
And my head cuddled into rank.

Then dreams through calm night didst thou fling—
Tumultuous birds of passage, borne
From Paphos, battling on the wing
Past Pompeii, till red, at dawn,
Showed villa-rooves with blood-shedding.

My feather-head to penance woke—
Sore plots to hide sheets stained by blood—
With furtive kisses to revoke
Threats that thy trampled deep-wronged bud
Made, flushed like highly-angered folk.

Of such portentous rain the talk
Was awed to whisper all day long—
I saw poor mother white as chalk,
When my joy burst the gates of song ;
For he had won me on our walk.—

Marvellous Venus, crowned by time
My locks are white as moon-lit snow,
My children's chubby children climb
Up by my knees, to sit and crow
Perched on the ruin of my prime.

For one thing I petition thee :—
While generations from these rise,
Let me ne'er lack heiress, to be
Like, as maid may, to her whose eyes
For peril far surpass the sea.

T. STURGE MOORE.