
 MATTHEW PRIOR

1664–1721

A True Maid

“No, no; for my virginity,
 When I lose that,” says Rose, “I’ll die.”
 “Behind the elms, last night,” cried Dick,
 “Rose, were you not extremely sick?”

1718

A Better Answer

To Cloe Jealous

Dear Cloe, how blubbered is that pretty face!
 Thy cheek all on fire, and thy hair all uncurled!
 Prithee quit this caprice; and (as old Falstaff says)
 Let us e’en talk a little like folks of this world.¹

5 How canst thou presume thou hast leave to destroy
 The beauties which Venus but lent to thy keeping?
 Those looks were designed to inspire love and joy;
 More ord’nary eyes may serve people for weeping.

10 To be vexed at a trifle or two that I writ,
 Your judgment at once and my passion you wrong:
 You take that for fact which will scarce be found wit:
 Od’s life! must one swear to the truth of a song?

What I speak, my fair Cloe, and what I write, shows
 The difference there is betwixt nature and art;
 15 I court others in verse, but I love thee in prose;
 And they have my whimsies, but thou hast my heart.

The god of us verse-men (you know, child) the Sun,
 How after his journeys he sets up his rest;
 If at morning o’er earth ’tis his fancy to run,
 20 At night he reclines on his Thetis’s breast.²

1. Cf. 2 *Henry IV* 5.3.101–102.

2. Apollo, god of poetry and of the sun, is said to recline at night on the breast of Thetis, one of the

Nereids or sea spirits, because the sun seems to sink into the western ocean.

So when I am wearied with wandering all day,
To thee, my delight, in the evening I come;
No matter what beauties I saw in my way—
They were but my visits, but thou art my home.

25 Then finish, dear Cloe, this pastoral war;
And let us like Horace and Lydia agree:³
For thou art a girl as much brighter than her,
As he was a poet sublimer than me.

1718

3. In Horace's *Odes* 3.9, the poet, who has been dallying with a girl named Cloe, makes up with Lydia, his former love.