

The Spider and the Swallow

by Jean de La Fontaine

"O Jupiter, whose fruitful brain,
By odd obstetrics freed from pain,
Bore Pallas, erst my mortal foe,
Pray listen to my tale of woe.
This Progne takes my lawful prey.
As through the air she cuts her way,
My flies she catches from my door,--
Yes, *mine*--I emphasize the word,--
And, but for this accursed bird,
My net would hold an ample store:
For I have woven it of stuff
To hold the strongest strong enough."
'Twas thus, in terms of insolence,
Complain'd the fretful spider, once
Of palace-tapestry a weaver,
But then a spinster and deceiver,
That hoped within her toils to bring
Of insects all that ply the wing.
The sister swift of Philomel,
Intent on business, prosper'd well;
In spite of the complaining pest,
The insects carried to her nest--
Nest pitiless to suffering flies--
Mouths gaping aye, to gormandize,
Of young ones clamouring,
And stammering,
With unintelligible cries.
The spider, with but head and feet,
And powerless to compete
With wings so fleet,
Soon saw herself a prey.
The swallow, passing swiftly by,
Bore web and all away,
The spinster dangling in the sky!

Two tables hath our Maker set

*For all that in this world are met.
To seats around the first
The skilful, vigilant, and strong are beckon'd:
Their hunger and their thirst
The rest must quell with leavings at the second.*