

DIANA

AUDREY ALEXANDRA BROWN

Over the far, faint slope of wistful trees
She walks in the immortal fields of heaven,
Past budding stars, that wait to break in bloom
Till she shall climb their stair with footprints seven:
Past the loose tresses of the Pleiad band,
Who, tired with dancing now, lie sleeping hand in hand.

She walks in the immortal fields of heaven:
They say, the flowers are sweet that open there:
That there are amaranth, purple-red like wine,
And lilies trembling in the lucent air:
And asphodels are white about her way,
Who walks immortal-young, immortal-fair as they.

O Goddess of the lightly-bended bow,
If that the pleasance native to thy feet
Be beautiful to thee—if in thine ear
The voice of star that calls to star is sweet—
What secret care is thine, what deep distress,
So gentle, yet so sad, in thy wan loveliness?

Art thou too mindful of a Latmian hill
All with the slender poppy stems a-blow,
And poppy petals satin-red as flame,
Where thou didst meet thy shepherd long ago?
Art weary of the brake, the ferny grot,
Where thou hast sought Endymion long, and found him not?

Be comforted, O Goddess! Thy white foot
Set lightlier in the silver fields of air:
I have beheld thy shepherd where he lies,
Have stolen on him dreaming unaware,
With curtained eyes and scarcely-stirring breath,
In that still sleep,—that sleep so very like to death.

Fair was he, even as thou art fair: unchanged
The curve of lip and cheek, all roseate still,
Unworn as when a thousand years ago
Sleep found him in the poppies on the hill:
Serene as Time, with pillowed head he lay,
Though Arcady is dead, Olympus passed away!

Wouldst wake him, Dian, were the power thine own
To charm those azure lids apart again—
To watch the darkened eyes grow slowly bright,
Gazing on thee in joy as sharp as pain?
Wouldst call him back from where, on pansied lea,
He wanders hand in hand—(so runs his dream)—with thee?

Far better he should sleep. The fern grows tall
Between his curls of amber where he lies:
Laurel and myrtle close him from the dew:
The sun is kindly to his shuttered eyes:
The jasmines hush their leaves, that no sound creep
On the immortal dream of his undying sleep.

Ah, to what pleasures couldst thou wake him now,
Even with thy kiss? The world is strange to him:
This is not Greece, upon whose olive trees
And faintly-gleaming hills his sight grew dim:
This is not Greece, whose ilex woods were stirred
In the mauve dusk, by pipes the sweetest soul e'er heard!

The groves are desolate: the birds make moan
About the leaves: no faun is left to peep
With roguish cheek and slyly-dimpled lip
Through the wild covert on Endymion's sleep:
No dryad comes with timid hand to spread
Fresh ivy for his couch, and berries coral-red.

His idle crook, with violets wreathed and twined,
Lies broken at his side: his patient sheep,
Who kept their watch beside him many a year,
Long, long have left him to his endless sleep.
How shall he seek them, wheresoe'er they feed,
Far from his ivory flute of plucked and hollowed reed?

But in that sleep which drowns heart and brain
 With one delicious dream, he does not know
 How nightshade darkens on the altar-stone,
 How the great gods are fallen long ago:
 How the young fawns with panting side bleed red,
 Lacking thy foster-care: how goat-hoofed Pan is dead.

Still let him sleep: for in that sleep he deems
 Things mutable, immutable: he sees
 The milk-white heifer, satin-smooth of flank,
 Cropping beneath the whiter hawthorn trees:
 He hears the sheep-bells chime, faint, faint and fair,
 Lost down the golden steps of never-fading air.

These are his pastures, quick with clover-bloom,
 And here his mild-eyed flocks at leisure climb,
 Like clouds upon the hill: he breathes an air
 Sweet with the breath of newly-trodden thyme:
 Half-open leaves, and linnet's nesting place,
 He sees, yet does not see for gazing on thy face.

Take comfort: all his dreams are dreams of thee.
 It is the splendor of thy loosened hair
 Makes morning in his dusk: through all his sleep
 Thou mov'st, for ever young, for ever fair,
 All secret thoughts, all hidden mysteries
 Made comprehensible in thy revealing eyes.

He sees thee in thy gown of huntress-green,
 White as new moon, with arm and shoulder bare,
 Braiding the primrose-colored tresses up
 That he would twist with lilac, did he dare:
 Thou art so near, so near he has forgot
 That he is mortal still, and thou his love art not.

He does not see thy beauty growing wan,
 Tremulous, as thy wheeling seasons wane.
 To him thou canst not change: for ever more
 Wilt thou be pitiful and he be fain;
 Though from that sleep which trances lip and brow,
 Not even thy tears, thy kiss, can ever wake him now!