

The Story of Arethusa

Still were the purling waters, and the maid
From the smooth surface rais'd her beauteous head,
Wipes off the drops that from her tresses ran,
And thus to tell Alpheus' loves began.

In Elis first I breath'd the living air,
The chase was all my pleasure, all my care.
None lov'd like me the forest to explore,
To pitch the toils, and drive the bristled boar.
Of fair, tho' masculine, I had the name,
But gladly wou'd to that have quitted claim:
It less my pride than indignation rais'd,
To hear the beauty I neglected, prais'd;
Such compliments I loath'd, such charms as these
I scorn'd, and thought it infamy to please.

Once, I remember, in the summer's heat,
Tir'd with the chase, I sought a cool retreat;
And, walking on, a silent current found,
Which gently glided o'er the grav'ly ground.
The chrystal water was so smooth, so clear,
My eye distinguish'd ev'ry pebble there.
So soft its motion, that I scarce perceiv'd
The running stream, or what I saw believ'd.
The hoary willow, and the poplar, made
Along the shelving bank a grateful shade.
In the cool rivulet my feet I dipt,
Then waded to the knee, and then I stript;
My robe I careless on an osier threw,
That near the place commodiously grew;
Nor long upon the border naked stood,
But plung'd with speed into the silver flood.
My arms a thousand ways I mov'd, and try'd
To quicken, if I cou'd, the lazy tide;
Where, while I play'd my swimming gambols o'er,
I heard a murm'ring voice, and frighted sprung to shore.
Oh! whither, Arethusa, dost thou fly?
From the brook's bottom did Alpheus cry;
Again, I heard him, in a hollow tone,
Oh! whither, Arethusa, dost thou run?
Naked I flew, nor cou'd I stay to hide
My limbs, my robe was on the other side;
Alpheus follow'd fast, th' inflaming sight
Quicken'd his speed, and made his labour light;

He sees me ready for his eager arms,
And with a greedy glance devours my charms.
As trembling doves from pressing danger fly,
When the fierce hawk comes sousing from the sky;
And, as fierce hawks the trembling doves pursue,
From him I fled, and after me he flew.
First by Orchomenus I took my flight,
And soon had Psophis and Cyllene in sight;
Behind me then high Maenalus I lost,
And craggy Erimanthus scal'd with frost;
Elis was next; thus far the ground I trod
With nimble feet, before the distanc'd God.
But here I lagg'd, unable to sustain
The labour longer, and my flight maintain;
While he more strong, more patient of the toil,
And fir'd with hopes of beauty's speedy spoil,
Gain'd my lost ground, and by redoubled pace,
Now left between us but a narrow space.
Unweary'd I 'till now o'er hills, and plains,
O'er rocks, and rivers ran, and felt no pains:
The sun behind me, and the God I kept,
But, when I fastest shou'd have run, I stept.
Before my feet his shadow now appear'd;
As what I saw, or rather what I fear'd.
Yet there I could not be deceiv'd by fear,
Who felt his breath pant on my braided hair,
And heard his sounding tread, and knew him to be near.
Tir'd, and despairing, O celestial maid,
I'm caught, I cry'd, without thy heav'nly aid.
Help me, Diana, help a nymph forlorn,
Devoted to the woods, who long has worn
Thy livery, and long thy quiver born.
The Goddess heard; my pious pray'r prevail'd;
In muffling clouds my virgin head was veil'd,
The am'rous God, deluded of his hopes,
Searches the gloom, and thro' the darkness gropes;
Twice, where Diana did her servant hide
He came, and twice, O Arethusa! cry'd.
How shaken was my soul, how sunk my heart!
The terror seiz'd on ev'ry trembling part.
Thus when the wolf about the mountain prowls
For prey, the lambkin hears his horrid howls:
The tim'rous hare, the pack approaching nigh,
Thus hearkens to the hounds, and trembles at the cry;
Nor dares she stir, for fear her scented breath
Direct the dogs, and guide the threaten'd death.

Alpheus in the cloud no traces found
To mark my way, yet stays to guard the ground,
The God so near, a chilly sweat possest
My fainting limbs, at ev'ry pore exprest;
My strength distill'd in drops, my hair in dew,
My form was chang'd, and all my substance new.
Each motion was a stream, and my whole frame
Turn'd to a fount, which still preserves my name.
Resolv'd I shou'd not his embrace escape,
Again the God resumes his fluid shape;
To mix his streams with mine he fondly tries,
But still Diana his attempt denies.
She cleaves the ground; thro' caverns dark I run
A diff'rent current, while he keeps his own.
To dear Ortygia she conducts my way,
And here I first review the welcome day.

Here Arethusa stopt; then Ceres takes
Her golden carr, and yokes her fiery snakes;
With a just rein, along mid-heaven she flies
O'er Earth, and seas, and cuts the yielding skies.
She halts at Athens, dropping like a star,
And to Triptolemus resigns her carr.
Parent of seed, she gave him fruitful grain,
And bad him teach to till and plough the plain;
The seed to sow, as well in fallow fields,
As where the soil manur'd a richer harvest yields.

Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 5.572-633

Translated by John Dryden

<<http://classics.mit.edu/Ovid/metam.5.fifth.html>>