



Hero.

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING, ACT 2 SC. 1.

## HERO.

In point of romantic interest and dramatic situation, Hero is undoubtedly the leading character in *Much Ado about Nothing*, although, adopting the popular appreciation, we have conferred the distinction of "first lady" on her cousin Beatrice—not the first time, by the by, that level and persistent vanity has succeeded in usurping the honorable place belonging to modest, graceful excellence.

A rare character of thought and power is shown in the trait in Hero's character which contrasts most strikingly in the affairs of her daily life: and in the contrast of her daily life to her cousin's character. Her character is as still as they are deep—her words are few, but they are well chosen, and she expresses herself well on occasion. Her conversation with Ursula, designed to be a contrast to Beatrice, in which her caustic description of that forward young woman is quite equal to many of the most brilliant remarks we remember that Beatrice issues from her conversation with "the lady in her own."

The readiness with which this "maiden, never bold" enters into the plot for obtaining her cousin's heart—"if so be that she



have such a thing about her"—as well as the admirable manner in which she plays her part, proves that Hero, with all her quiet dignity, entertains no small relish for fun, and that she is far from lacking in the healthy vivacity befitting her youth and happy circumstance. Her reply to Don Pedro, when he proposes her share in the merry conspiracy, is as characteristic as it is unhesitating:

I will do any modest office, my lord, to help my  
cousin to a good husband.

It is noticeable that in the repartee—coarse even for the women of Shakspeare's time—bandied by the less fastidious tongues of her rattle-brain cousin and her gentlewoman, she never takes part, unless to repel some direct attack upon herself, with a

Fye upon thee! Art not ashamed?

—and that, too, with no affectation of prudery; her delicacy is as virgin as Desdemona's, that very snow-drop among women.

This quality is beautifully displayed in the church, also, whither she has been led by her "new-trothed lord"—to be made a wife, she fondly believes; but finds herself, instead, suddenly forsworn, and charged with that of which her pure mind has no conception. The simple words of incredulous amazement with which she at first receives her lover's violent accusations, remind one of the majestic Hermione on an occasion somewhat similar:

*Claud.* Out on thy seeming! I will write against it:  
You seem to me as Dian in her orb,  
As chaste as is the bud ere it be blown;

But you are more intemperate in your blood  
Than Venus, or those pamper'd animals  
That rage in savage sensuality.

*Hero.* Is my lord well, that he doth speak so wide?

We can far more easily forgive Claudio, in the full tide of youth and passion, his suspicions of his mistress—particularly as he had "assisted" at the chamber-window scene—than Leonato his ready conviction of his daughter's guilt; but we accord a grateful memorial, for this fair lady's sake, to the good priest, whose words of wisdom befit the sanctity of his calling and the purity of his heart:

*Friar.* Hear me a little—

For I have only been silent so long,  
And given way unto this course of fortune,  
By noting of the lady; I have mark'd  
A thousand blushing apparitions start  
Into her face, a thousand innocent shames  
In angel whiteness bear away those blushes;  
And in her eye there hath appear'd a fire,  
To burn the errors that these princes hold  
Against her maiden truth:—Call me a fool;  
Trust not my reading, nor my observations,  
Which with experimental zeal doth warrant  
The tenor of my book; trust not my age,  
My reverence, calling, nor divinity,  
If this sweet lady lie not guiltless here  
Under some biting error.

\* \* \* \* \*  
Your daughter here the princes left for dead;  
Let her awhile be secretly kept in,  
And publish it that she is dead indeed;

\* \* \* \* \*  
So will it fare with Claudio:  
When he shall hear she died upon his words,  
The idea of her life shall sweetly creep



Into his study of imagination;  
 And every lovely organ of her life  
 Shall come apparell'd in more precious habit,  
 More moving-delicate, and full of life,  
 Into the eye and prospect of his soul,  
 Than when she liv'd indeed.

Of Hero's person we have only a few hints: she was certainly of low stature, much less tall than her cousin Beatrice, for Benedick styles her "Leonato's short daughter;" and if it be not hazardous to take this merry lord's word on so grave an issue, we may gather from him a more distinct personification—always remembering that he is already half in love, in his madcap way, with Beatrice, and would be therefore likely, in comparing them, to disparage Hero:

*Claud.* Benedick, didst thou note the daughter of Signior Leonato?

*Bene.* I noted her not; but I looked on her.

*Claud.* Is she not a modest young lady?

*Bene.* Do you question me, as an honest man should do, for my simple true judgment? or would you have me speak after my custom, as being a professed tyrant to their sex?

*Claud.* No, I pray thee speak in sober judgment.

*Bene.* Why, i' faith, methinks she is too low for a high praise, too brown for a fair praise, and too little for a great praise. Only this commendation I can afford her: that were she other than she is, she were unhandsome; and being no other but as she is, I do not like her.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Claud.* In mine eye, she is the sweetest lady that ever I looked on.

*Bene.* I can see yet without spectacles, and I see no such matter; there's her cousin, an she were not possessed with a fury, exceeds her as much in beauty as the first of May doth the last of December.

Be this as it may, we feel bound to attribute no inconsiderable amount of beauty to a woman who could inspire her lover with such a delicate declaration of his perception of it, as is contained in these words of Claudio to Don Pedro, his patron:

O my lord,

When you went onward on this ended action,

I look'd upon her with a soldier's eye,

That lik'd, but had a rougher task in hand

Than to drive liking to the name of love;

But now I am return'd, and that war-thoughts

Have left their places vacant, in their rooms

Come thronging soft and delicate desires,

All prompting me how fair young Hero is,

Saying I lik'd her ere I went to wars.





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A rare chasteness of thought and person is plainly the trait in Hero's character which expresses itself most distinctly in the affairs of her daily life; and in this particular she affords a lively contrast to her cousin's inherent vulgarity. Her emotions are as still as they are deep—her words few; yet, that she can express herself well on occasion, is attested by her conversation with Ursula, designed to be overheard by Beatrice, in which her caustic description of that flippant young woman is quite equal to many of *her* renowned sallies; no wonder that Beatrice issues from her concealment with "fire in her ears."

The readiness with which this "maiden, never bold" enters into the plot for catching her cousin's heart—"if so be that she