

# CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE

HERO AND  
LEANDER

**Christopher Marlowe**  
**Hero and Leander**

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*Hero and Leander:*

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## Hero and Leander

### First Sestiad

On Hellespont, guilty of true-love's blood,  
In view and opposite two cities stood,  
Sea-borderers, disjoined by Neptune's might;  
The one Abydos, the other Sestos hight.  
At Sestos Hero dwelt; Hero the fair,  
Whom young Apollo courted for her hair,  
And offered as a dower his burning throne,  
Where she should sit for men to gaze upon.  
The outside of her garments were of lawn,  
The lining purple silk, with gilt stars drawn;  
Her wide sleeves green, and bordered with a grove,  
Where Venus in her naked glory strove  
To please the careless and disdainful eyes  
Of proud Adonis, that before her lies.  
Her kirtle blue, whereon was many a stain,  
Made with the blood of wretched lovers slain.  
Upon her head she ware a myrtle wreath,  
From whence her veil reached to the ground beneath.  
Her veil was artificial flowers and leaves  
Whose workmanship both man and beast deceives.

Many would praise the sweet smell as she passed,  
When 'twas the odour which her breath forth cast;  
And there for honey bees have sought in vain,  
And, beat from thence, have lighted there again.  
About her neck hung chains of pebblestone,  
Which, lightened by her neck, like diamonds shone.  
She ware no gloves; for neither sun nor wind  
Would burn or parch her hands, but to her mind,  
Or warm or cool them, for they took delight  
To play upon those hands, they were so white.  
Buskins of shells, all silvered used she,  
And branched with blushing coral to the knee;  
Where sparrows perched of hollow pearl and gold,  
Such as the world would wonder to behold.  
Those with sweet water oft her handmaid fills,  
Which, as she went, would chirrup through the bills.  
Some say for her the fairest Cupid pined  
And looking in her face was strooken blind.  
But this is true: so like was one the other,  
As he imagined Hero was his mother.  
And oftentimes into her bosom flew,  
About her naked neck his bare arms threw,  
And laid his childish head upon her breast,  
And, with still panting rocked, there took his rest.  
So lovely fair was Hero, Venus' nun,  
As Nature wept, thinking she was undone,  
Because she took more from her than she left,  
And of such wondrous beauty her bereft.  
Therefore, in sign her treasure suffered wrack,

Since Hero's time hath half the world been black.

Amorous Leander, beautiful and young,  
(whose tragedy divine Musaeus sung,)  
Dwelt at Abydos; since him dwelt there none  
For whom succeeding times make greater moan.  
His dangling tresses, that were never shorn,  
Had they been cut, and unto Colchos borne,  
Would have allured the vent'rous youth of Greece  
To hazard more than for the golden fleece.  
Fair Cynthia wished his arms might be her sphere;  
Grief makes her pale, because she moves not there.  
His body was as straight as Circe's wand;  
Jove might have sipped out nectar from his hand.  
Even as delicious meat is to the taste,  
So was his neck in touching, and surpassed  
The white of Pelop's shoulder. I could tell ye  
How smooth his breast was and how white his belly;  
And whose immortal fingers did imprint  
That heavenly path with many a curious dint  
That runs along his back, but my rude pen  
Can hardly blazon forth the loves of men,  
Much less of powerful gods. Let it suffice  
That my slack Muse sings of Leander's eyes,  
Those orient cheeks and lips, exceeding his  
That leaped into the water for a kiss  
Of his own shadow and, despising many,  
Died ere he could enjoy the love of any.  
Had wild Hippolytus Leander seen

Enamoured of his beauty had he been.  
His presence made the rudest peasant melt  
That in the vast uplandish country dwelt.  
The barbarous Thracian soldier, moved with nought,  
Was moved with him and for his favour sought.  
Some swore he was a maid in man's attire,  
For in his looks were all that men desire,  
A pleasant smiling cheek, a speaking eye,  
A brow for love to banquet royally;  
And such as knew he was a man, would say,  
"Leander, thou art made for amorous play.  
Why art thou not in love, and loved of all?  
Though thou be fair, yet be not thine own thrall."

The men of wealthy Sestos every year,  
(For his sake whom their goddess held so dear,  
Rose-cheeked Adonis) kept a solemn feast.  
Thither resorted many a wandering guest  
To meet their loves.  
Such as had none at all,  
Came lovers home from this great festival.  
For every street like to a firmament  
Glistered with breathing stars who, where they went,  
Frighted the melancholy earth which deemed  
Eternal heaven to burn, for so it seemed,  
As if another Phaeton had got  
The guidance of the sun's rich chariot.  
But far above the loveliest Hero shined  
And stole away th' enchanted gazer's mind,

For like sea nymphs' enveigling Harmony,  
So was her beauty to the standers by.  
Nor that night-wandering, pale, and wat'ry star  
(When yawning dragons draw her thirling car  
From Latmus' mount up to the gloomy sky  
Where, crowned with blazing light and majesty,  
She proudly sits) more overrules the flood  
Than she the hearts of those that near her stood.  
Even as, when gaudy nymphs pursue the chase,  
Wretched Ixion's shaggy footed race,  
Incensed with savage heat, gallop amain  
From steep pine-bearing mountains to the plain.  
So ran the people forth to gaze upon her,  
And all that viewed her were enamoured on her.  
And as in fury of a dreadful fight,  
Their fellows being slain or put to flight,  
Poor soldiers stand with fear of death dead strooken,  
So at her presence all surprised and tooken,  
Await the sentence of her scornful eyes.  
He whom she favours lives, the other dies.  
There might you see one sigh, another rage;  
And some, (their violent passions to assuage)  
Compile sharp satires, but alas too late,  
For faithful love will never turn to hate.  
And many seeing great princes were denied  
Pin'd as they went, and thinking on her died.  
On this feast day, O cursed day and hour,  
Went Hero thorough Sestos from her tower  
To Venus' temple, where unhappily

As after chanced, they did each other spy.

So fair a church as this had Venus none.

The walls were of discoloured jasper stone

Wherein was Proteus carved, and o'erhead

A lively vine of green sea agate spread,

Where by one hand lightheaded Bacchus hung,

And, with the other, wine from grapes out wrung.

Of crystal shining fair the pavement was.

The town of Sestos called it Venus' glass.

There might you see the gods in sundry shapes

Committing heady riots, incest, rapes.

For know, that underneath this radiant floor

Was Danae's statue in a brazen tower,

Jove slyly stealing from his sister's bed,

To dally with Idalian Ganymede,

And for his love Europa bellowing loud,

And tumbling with the Rainbow in a cloud;

Blood quaffing Mars heaving the iron net

Which limping Vulcan and his Cyclops set;

Love kindling fire to burn such towns as Troy;

Sylvanus weeping for the lovely boy

That now is turned into a cypress tree,

Under whose shade the wood gods love to be.

And in the midst a silver altar stood.

There Hero, sacrificing turtle's blood,

Vailed to the ground, vailing her eyelids close,

And modestly they opened as she rose.

Thence flew Love's arrow with the golden head,

And thus Leander was enamoured.  
Stone still he stood, and evermore he gazed  
Till with the fire that from his countenance blazed  
Relenting Hero's gentle heart was strook.  
Such force and virtue hath an amorous look.

It lies not in our power to love or hate,  
For will in us is overruled by fate.  
When two are stripped, long ere the course begin  
We wish that one should lose, the other win.  
And one especially do we affect  
Of two gold ingots like in each respect.  
The reason no man knows; let it suffice  
What we behold is censured by our eyes.  
Where both deliberate, the love is slight:  
Who ever loved, that loved not at first sight?

He kneeled, but unto her devoutly prayed.  
Chaste Hero to herself thus softly said,  
"Were I the saint he worships, I would hear him;"  
And, as she spake those words, came somewhat near him.  
He started up, she blushed as one ashamed,  
Wherewith Leander much more was inflamed.  
He touched her hand; in touching it she trembled.  
Love deeply grounded, hardly is dissembled.  
These lovers parleyed by the touch of hands;  
True love is mute, and oft amazed stands.  
Thus while dumb signs their yielding hearts entangled,  
The air with sparks of living fire was spangled,

And night, deep drenched in misty Acheron,  
Heaved up her head, and half the world upon  
Breathed darkness forth (dark night is Cupid's day).  
And now begins Leander to display  
Love's holy fire, with words, with sighs, and tears,  
Which like sweet music entered Hero's ears,  
And yet at every word she turned aside,  
And always cut him off as he replied.  
At last, like to a bold sharp sophister,  
With cheerful hope thus he accosted her.  
"Fair creature, let me speak without offence.  
I would my rude words had the influence  
To lead thy thoughts as thy fair looks do mine,  
Then shouldst thou be his prisoner, who is thine.  
Be not unkind and fair; misshapen stuff  
Are of behaviour boisterous and rough.

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