

John Keats (1795-1821)

1 *La Belle Dame sans Merci*

I.

Ah, what can ail thee, wretched wight,
Alone and palely loitering;
The sedge is wither'd from the lake,
And no birds sing.

II.

Ah, what can ail thee, wretched wight, 5
So haggard and so woe-begone?
The squirrel's granary is full,
And the harvest's done.

III.

I see a lilly on thy brow,
With anguish moist and fever dew; 10
And on thy cheek a fading rose
Fast withereth too.

IV.

I met a lady in the meads
Full beautiful, a faery's child;
Her hair was long, her foot was light, 15
And her eyes were wild.

V.

I set her on my pacing steed,
And nothing else saw all day long;
For sideways would she lean, and sing
A faery's song. 20

VI.

I made a garland for her head,
And bracelets too, and fragrant zone;
She look'd at me as she did love,
And made sweet moan.

VII.

She found me roots of relish sweet, 25
 And honey wild, and manna dew;
 And sure in language strange she said,
 I love thee true.

VIII.

She took me to her elfin grot,
 And there she gaz'd and sighed deep, 30
 And there I shut her wild sad eyes —
 So kiss'd to sleep.

IX.

And there we slumber'd on the moss,
 And there I dream'd, ah woe betide,
 The latest dream I ever dream'd 35
 On the cold hill side.

X.

I saw pale kings, and princes too,
 Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
 Who cry'd — "La belle Dame sans merci
 Hath thee in thrall!" 40

XI.

I saw their starv'd lips in the gloam
 With horrid warning gaped wide,
 And I awoke, and found me here
 On the cold hill side.

XII.

And this is why I sojourn here 45
 Alone and palely loitering,
 Though the sedge is wither'd from the lake,
 And no birds sing.

1819

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 Introduction and Textual Notes by H. Buxton Forman.
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