

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*

(From *The Poetical Works of John Keats*. With an  
 Introduction and Textual Notes by H. Buxton Forman.  
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