

# La Belle Dame sans Merci: A Ballad

POETRY OUT LOUD 

By John Keats

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,  
Alone and palely loitering?  
The sedge has withered from the lake,  
And no birds sing.

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,  
So haggard and so woe-begone?  
The squirrel's granary is full,  
And the harvest's done.

I see a lily on thy brow,  
With anguish moist and fever-dew,  
And on thy cheeks a fading rose  
Fast withereth too.

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

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

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

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

She took me to her Elfin grot,  
And there she wept and sighed full sore,  
And there I shut her wild wild eyes  
With kisses four.

And there she lullèd me asleep,  
And there I dreamed—Ah! woe betide!—  
The latest dream I ever dreamt  
On the cold hill side.

I saw pale kings and princes too,  
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;  
They cried—'La Belle Dame sans Merci  
Thee hath in thrall!'

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

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

Notes:

*POL participants and judges:* in this poem's third-to-last stanza, recitations that include "Hath thee in thrall!" or "Thee hath in thrall!" are both acceptable.

Source: *Selected Poems* (Penguin Classics, 1988)