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JOHN KEATS

LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI: A BALLAD

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.