

La Belle Dame Sans Merci
By John Keats
SYBSC English
(Ability Enhancement Course-AEC)
(Choice Based Credit System-35:15-Pattern)
(w. e. f- 2020- 2021)

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La Belle Dame Sans Merci

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.

John Keats (born October 31, 1795, London, England—died February 23, 1821, Rome, Papal States [Italy]), English Romantic lyric poet who devoted his short life to the perfection of a poetry marked by vivid imagery, great sensuous appeal, and an attempt to express a philosophy through classical lore. His poetry is a blend of romanticism and philosophy. He is a popular poetic figure of romanticism.

The poem ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’ is written by John Keats. It is a conversation (in verse) between the poet and a knight who fell in love with a lady

but she left him. 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' is a French phrase meaning the lady without mercy. The poem comprises 12 stanzas and has rhyme scheme ABCB.

It is John Keats's finest ballad in English literature. The poem narrates a sad and tragic love, betrayal of a young knight who falls in love with a fairy. Just as the knight in the poem could not get the love of his beloved fairy, Keats also could not get success in love with Fanny. In this sense, this poem to some extent is an autobiographical poem.

The poem narrates a story of a knight's disappointed love with a fairy who is a mysterious lady. Once a knight was wandering about in a sad and dejected mood by the side of the lake. Someone or the poet asked the knight why he was so pale and haggard. The knight replied that he had met a beautiful lady in the meadows and was fascinated by her looks and beautiful features. She also fell in love with him. They both rode on a horseback, till they reached the cave of the fairy. There the lady expressed her love for him and lulled him to sleep. He saw a dream. In the dream he saw pale kings and warriors. All of them told him that the beautiful lady without mercy had captivated him. Their manner of warning terrified him. He woke up. Instead of finding himself in the cave of his lady-love, he found himself by the side of the hill. This was the reason why he was pale and haggard. Frustration in love made him sad, dejected, pale and haggard-looking.

It is a romantic ballad as much as it deals with the theme of love. Also, supernatural elements create an atmosphere of enchantment. Poem also conveys the message that love, like a flower, is short-lived. The joy is quite short and suffering is forever. It also reflects how beauty can deceive a person and make him fail or suffer.

Thus, the poem is said to be a record of Keats' experience of love. It conveys a note of betrayal. Unlike other poets, the poet does not celebrate the beauty but rather considers it as something which causes grief and suffering.