

La Belle Dame Sans Merci - John Keats

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Summary:

- La Belle Dame Sans Merci by John Keats is a **ballad**. The poem describes a short encounter between a knight and a fairy which leaves the knight with a lily on the brow.
- **The Maiden**: The knight describes a fanciful journey alongside a beautiful fairylike maiden who seduces her with her singing and looks which leaves the knight with cold horror.
- **Exchange of Gifts**: The knight gifts her garland for her head and bracelets as a token of his love. She feeds him roots, sings him songs and makes her come into her elfin grot, a cave where she lulls the knight into deep slumber.
- **The Dream**: In the dream, the knight sees pale kings and princes who warn him about the Fairy.
- **Conclusion**: Later, the knight wakes up and is all alone in the cold hillside with no sign of the beautiful maiden.

Poem Analysis:

Rhyming scheme: ABCB

Poetic devices:

- **Imagery**
- Alliteration: repetition of syllable-initial consonant sounds.
- **Assonance**: Repetition of vowel sounds in the same line.
- **Meter**: its largely iambic tetrameter with **stress falling on the 4th word**.

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,

Alone and palely loitering?

The sedge has withered from the lake,

And no birds sing.

- In the above stanza the poet sees a knight loitering around in cold winter where even birds don't sing.

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,

So **haggard**^[1] and so **woe-begone**^[2]?

The squirrel's granary is full

And the harvest's done.

In the above stanza the poet describes the state of the knight whose face is **looking worn out, tired**^[1] and **deeply distressed**^[2]. The poet also once again describes the cold winters by mentioning examples that even squirrels have stopped collecting food for winter and the harvest has also been done.

I see a lily on thy brow,

With anguish moist and fever-dew,

And on thy cheeks a fading rose

Fast withereth too.

- In the above stanza the poet describes the knight's face which is looking pale and white like a lily. The knight also looks worried and anxious.

I met a lady in the **meads**^[1],

Full beautiful—a faery's child,

Her hair was long, her foot was light,

And her eyes were wild.

- In the above stanza the knight describes about the beautiful lady he met in the **grasslands**^[1]. He describes that her hair were long, feet were light and her eyes were beautiful as if she was a fairy.

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'.

- In the above stanzas the knight describes that he gave her garlands for her head and bracelets as a token of his love. Then he took her on her horse on which she sang a fairy's song. She gave her sweets delicious like manna from heaven and said to the knight in a strange language which the knight thought that she said that she also loved him.

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 lulled me asleep,

And there I dreamed—Ah! woe betide!—

The latest dream I ever dreamt

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 gaped 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.

- In the above stanzas the knight tells that then she took her to her cave where she cried and so the knight kissed her. Then she lulled him asleep. While sleeping he saw a dream in which he saw pale kings and princess whose lips were starved and there face was pale as if they were dead. They all said "La Belle Dame sans Merci Thee hath in thrall " - they warned him that he had also fallen into the lady's trap. He then says that when he woke up he was on the cold hillside.

Q1) what attribute does the knight share with the kings , princes and warriors of his dream?

- The knight describes the kings princes and warriors of his dream as having deathlike pale faces and starved lips.

Q2) What season of the year is the poem set in?

- The poem is set in the season of winter.

Q3) What does the word wild mean in the context of 4th stanza?

Q4) What is the question posed in the poem?

- The question posed in first stanza to the knight is "O what can ail thee" . This phrase reflects that the knight who is the protagonist of the poem is in distress. The poet asks him why he is sad and roaming around in the cold hillside where there is no green grass and no birds sing. The first three stanzas pose as a question to the knight while the remaining stanzas constitute the knights reply.

Q5) Describe the appearance of the knight when the poet finds him. How does it reflect his mental state?

- The knight's physical appearance in the poem is a reflection of his mental state. His pale face, fading colour, and signs of sweat and pain suggest that he is not only physically ill but also emotionally tormented.

The knight's wandering in the cold, desolate hillside where no birds sing indicates a sense of loneliness and despair. This description of the winter is a metaphor for his mental state, suggesting he is lost, confused, and in emotional pain.

His encounter with the beautiful lady has left him in a state of longing and unfulfilled desire, which has led to his current state of distress. This reflects a mental state of obsession and unrequited love, which has resulted in his physical and emotional deterioration.

Q6) Describe the knight dream in detail.

- The knight had a nightmare when the beautiful otherworldly lady lulled the knight into deep slumber in her cave. In the nightmare he saw Kings , Princes and Warriors whose faces were ghastly pale like those of dead bodies. They were all crying to the knight that the lady without mercy had enslaved and made him her victim as she had made them earlier.

Q7) what do the people in the dream symbolize?

- The kings, princes and warriors in the knights dream symbolize the knights mind warning him about the mysterious lady and the destructive power of obsessive love and the mental anguish it can cause. The dream serves as a warning of the knights own fate if he continues to fall prey to the obsession of the fairy-like lady.

Q8) Describe the appearance of the knight and how it reflects his mental state?

- In the poem "Le Belle Dame Sans Merci" John Keats has used the nature as a symbolism of the knights emotional and mental state.
- The "wither'd sedge" and absence of singing birds indicate a desolate, lifeless environment, reflecting the knight's despair.
- The "lily" on his brow, often associated with death, suggests his declining health. The "fading rose" on his cheeks symbolizes the end of his romantic relationship and his fading vitality
- The changing seasons, from the vibrant spring/summer during his time with the lady to the bleak autumn/winter afterwards, mirror his transition from a state of love and vitality to one of despair and decay.
- Thus nature in the poem is a powerful symbol of the knight's emotional and physical state.

Q9) How does the poet create supernatural atmosphere? Focus on the diction and imagery.

- The poet John Keats has uses imagery to describe the mental state and to set the supernatural atmosphere in the poem. The imagery helps the reader to make vivid mental images which help in understanding the layered philosophical meaning of the poem.
- Keats uses words like "faery's child", "wild eyes", "elfin grot", and "language strange" to describe the lady. These terms evoke a sense of the supernatural and suggest that the lady is not of this world.
- The knight's ability to understand the strange language of the lady also suggests that the lady had possessed the knight through her other-worldly trickery. The imagery of the knight's dream, where he sees "pale kings and princes too, pale warriors, death-pale were they all", creates a ghostly and eerie scene, enhancing the supernatural theme

Q10) Comment on the title of the poem and how does it reflect what the poem is about?

- The title of the poem, "La Belle Dame Sans Merci", is French for "The Beautiful Lady Without Mercy". This title is significant as it encapsulates the central theme of the poem. The poem narrates the encounter between a knight and a mysterious lady, who is the "beautiful lady" referred to in the title. She seduces the knight with her beauty and singing, and then abandons him, leaving him in a state of despair and longing. This is where the "without mercy" or "without pity" part of the title comes into play. The lady shows no mercy or pity towards the knight, condemning him to a fate of unrequited love and emotional torment. Thus, the title directly relates to the poem's content, providing a succinct summary of the tragic love story that unfolds in the poem. It sets the tone for the poem and hints at the supernatural and tragic elements that are central to the narrative.

