La Belle Dame Sans Merci. A Ballad

I

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

Alone and palely loitering?

The sedge has withered from the lake,

And no birds sing.

II

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

So haggard and so woe-begone?

The squirrel’s granary is full,

And the harvest’s done.

III

I see a lily on thy brow,

With anguish moist and fever-dew,

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,

And her eyes were wild.

V

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.

VI

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.

VII

She found me roots of relish sweet,

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 wept and sighed full sore,

And there I shut her wild wild eyes

With kisses four.

IX

And there she lullèd me asleep

And there I dreamed – Ah! woe betide! –

The latest dream I ever dreamt

On the cold hill side.

X

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!’

XI

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.

XII

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

\*Manna – Food from heaven