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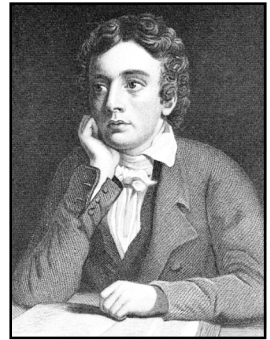
La Belle Dame Sans Merci

John Keats (1795-1821)

CHAPTER

➡ About the Poet

John Keats was born in London in 1795. He was educated at a private school at Enfield and at the age of fifteen, was apprenticed to a surgeon. But he gave up medicine in favour of poetry. In 1817, he published his first volume of verse but it attracted little notice. His family troubles started for his frustration. He got Fanny Brawne for his love affair but it could not run smooth. His malady, however, became worse and mental and physical distress caused his despair regarding the failure of love. He died at the young age of twenty six. Some of his great poems are 'Ode to A Nightingale', 'Ode to Autumn', 'The Terror of Death', 'On First Looking into Chopman's Homer' and 'On a Grecian Urn'.



➡ About the Poem

The poem is a sad story of a knight who had been bewitched by a fairy. He had met her in the plains and he was charmed by her long hair, her light foot and her wild eyes. He decorated her with garlands and bracelets. She seemed to love him. He set her on his steed and rode with her all day long while she sang to him her fairy song. She fed him with honey and manna dew. Then she took him to her cave and made love to him and lulled him to sleep. While asleep, he dreamt of pale kings and warriors who were death pale and looked like ghosts. They warned him that like them, he too was a victim of the lady without mercy. When he woke up, he found the fairy gone and himself, by the cold hillside.



I

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

II

*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.*

III

*I see a lily on thy brow,
With anguish moist and fever dew;
And on thy cheeks 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 look'd 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 fairy'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 sigh'd full sore,
And there I shut her wild wild eyes,
With kisses four.*

IX

*And there she lulled me asleep,
And there I dream'd—Ah! woe betide!
The latest dream I ever dream'd,
On the cold hill-side.*

X

*I saw pale kings and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
The cried—"La Belle Dame Sans Merci
Hath thee in thrall!"*

XI

*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.*

XII

*And this is why I sojourn here,
Alone and palely loitering;
Though the sedge has wither'd from the lake,
And no birds sing.*

—John Keats

➡ Appreciation of the Poem

The poem, "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" is composed by John Keats, one of the greatest romantic poets of his age. He was a true worshipper of beauty in all things. To him, "Beauty is Truth, truth is beauty—that is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know". This poem is a fine example of modern ballads. Ballad is a poem telling a story, usually sad and painful, using a stanza form called ballad stanza in which four lines form a unit. Here, this poem describes a weary knight by the side of a snow covered mountain. The sight of a beautiful lady with perfect grace and grandeur charms him. But he is at last dejected and disappointed in his love. It could be interpreted as autobiographical. The knight, in the poem, is Keats himself and the beautiful exchattrress is Fanny Brawne, a French girl with whom, he fell in love but met with sorrow and dejection.

The poem is **romantic** for its supernatural element, romantic imagination and lucidity of expression.

||Glossary||

La Belle Dame Sans Merci	: a beautiful lady without mercy (सुन्दर तथा निर्दयी महिला)
knight at arms	: a brave man fully armed going about in search of adventure (शस्त्रों से पूर्णतः सुसज्जित साहसी कार्य की खोज में निकला योद्धा)
palely	: looking pale (कटघरे को देखना)
loitering	: wandering (विचरना, भटकना)
sedge	: grass like plant (पेड़ों जैसी घास)

withered	: dried (सूखा, निर्जल, शुष्क, नीरस, प्यासा)
haggard	: wild looking, lean and thin (रूक्ष आकृति का, दुबला पतला)
woe-begone	: miserable (दुःखी, तुच्छ, घृणास्पद)
granary	: store of grains (अन्नागार)
brow	: Forehead (ललाट, भौंह, किनारा)
with anguish moist and	: the knight is perspiring on account of mental fever dew tension
fading	: withering (मुरझाया हुआ)
meads	: meadows (घास का मैदान)
her foot was light	: she walked gracefully (वह आराम से टहल रही थीं)
fragrant zone	: girdle of flowers (फूलों की मेखला)
moan	: expression of complaint (प्यार की आह, प्रेम भरी आह)
set her	: made her sit (उसे बैठाना)
pacing	: going fast (तेज चलना)
steed	: horse (घोड़ा, अश्व)
manna dew	: a kind of divine food (एक प्रकार का दैवी भोज्य पदार्थ)
elfin	: pertaining to elves (पिशाच सम्बन्धी, छोटी परी)
grot	: cave (गुफा, कन्दरा)
sigh'd full sore	: bitterly expressed her deep grief (उसके द्वारा कटुतापूर्वक प्रकट किया गया दुःख)
lulled me asleep	: sang a lullaby and put me to sleep (थपथपाकर तथा गाकर सुला दिया)
Ah! woe be tide	: The knight is lamenting over his frightful dream (योद्धा भयावह सपने को याद कर रो रहा है)
thrall	: slavery (दासत्व)
starved	: dying of hunger (भूख से व्याकुल)
gloom	: dim light (हल्का प्रकाश)
gaped	: opened (खोलना)
sojourn	: stay (रुकना)
horried	: fearful (भययुक्त)

|| Exercise ||

➡ **Answer the following questions :**

1. Write the central idea of the poem 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci'.
2. Name the Figure of Speech :
I see a lily on thy brow.

➡ **Explain the following lines with reference to the context :**

1. I see a lily too.
2. I saw pale kings in thrall.
3. And this is why sing.
4. I met were wild.
5. She took kisses four.
6. I saw in the all.
7. I saw hill's side.
8. She found true.

