

# দাশানী ওই সুন্দরী

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(১৮২০ সনে প্রকাশিত)

[ বাংলায় অনূদিতঃ জাফর উল্লাহ ]

আহা, কি পীড়া দেয় তোমায়, যাতনাবিধুর সাহসীযুবা,  
নিঃসঙ্গ ও পাণ্ডুবর্ণ মুখ নিয়ে ঘোরাফেরাই সার;  
বিবর্ণ হয়েছে এ' জলাভূমির ঘাস,  
গাইছে না আর কোন পাখী গান।

আহা, কি পীড়া দেয় তোমায়, যাতনাবিধুর সাহসীযুবা,  
কত ক্লিশ্যমান, আর কত দুশ্চিন্তা তোমার?  
কাঠবেড়ালীর ভান্ডার এখন পরিপূর্ণ,  
আর কাটা হয়ে গেছে মাঠের সব ফসল।

দুশ্চিন্তায় আদ্র ও জরঘামে সিক্ত ভুরুর  
ওপর একগাছি লিলিফুল অর্পিত।  
আর তোমার কপোলের রাঙা রং মিশিয়ে যাচ্ছে  
শিগগির তা হয়ে যাবে বিবর্ণ।

বনের খোলা যায়গায় দেখা হয়েছিল এক যুবার সাথে  
অত্যন্ত সুন্দরী সে, মনে হয় যেন পরীকন্যা;  
চুল তার অতি দীর্ঘ, লঘু পায়ে তার চলাফেরা,  
চোখে যেন তার আবেগ-ঘন দৃষ্টি।

আমি চলিত ঘোড়ায় সাথী হয়েছিলুম তার সনে,  
আর কিছু দেখার সময় হয়ে উঠেনি আমার;  
একদিকে হেলান দিয়ে গাইছিল সে গান,  
পরীদের সেই আদ্ভুত সুর দিয়ে।

মাথার মুকুট তার তৈরী করেছিলুম ফুল দিয়ে,  
হাতের বালাও, যার ঘ্রাণ সুবাস ছড়ালো চারিদিকে,

তাকালো সে আমার পানে প্রেমাতুর দৃষ্টিতে,  
কইলোনা কথা, তবু উহঃ আহঃ করলো কেবল।

মাটি চিরে বের করে এনে সে দিল আমায়  
মিষ্টি শিকড়, আরো আনলো মধু আর স্বর্গীয় শিশির;  
তার অদ্ভুত বচনে কইলো,  
“আমি যে সত্যি ভালোবাসিগো তোমায়”।

পরীর দেশের কুটিরে তার নিয়ে গেলো আমায়,  
সেখানে ঘুরে ফিরে তাকায় সে - আর ছাড়ে দীর্ঘনিশ্বাস,  
স্বহস্তে তার বুনো ও বেদনাবিধুর চোখ মুদে দিলুম—  
আর চুষনে তা লেপে দিলুম ঘুমাবার তরে।

আর সেখানে ঘুমালাম দু’জন শৈবালের ’পরে,  
স্বপ্ন দেখলুম এস্তার, যা সবি দুঃখের,  
সর্ব শেষ স্বপ্ন আমি দেখলুম  
সেই হিম্যানি পাহাড়ের গায়ে ।

দেখেছি অনেক ফ্যাকাশে রাজা আর যুবরাজাদের মুখমন্ডল,  
আরো দেখেছি বিবর্ণমুখী বিজয়ী যোদ্ধাদের,  
সবাই চোঁচিয়ে সমস্বরে বললো — “পাষাণী ওই সুন্দরী  
মোহাচ্ছন্ন করে রেখেছে মোদের”।

আমি দেখেছি তাদের বিশুদ্ধ ওষ্ঠাধর সন্ধ্যা লগ্নে  
হা-করে আছে তা’দের মুখ যেন বলতে চাইছে ‘সাবধান’,  
ঘুম ভাঙতেই বুঝলুম এ’ আমি কোথায়,  
সেই হিম্যানি পাহাড়ের গায়ে ।

সে’ কারণেই এখানে আমি ক্ষণিকের তরে,  
নিঃসঙ্গ ও পাণ্ডুবর্ণ মুখ নিয়ে ঘোরাফেরাই সার  
যদিও বিবর্ণ হয়েছে এ’ জলাভূমির ঘাস,  
গাইছে না আর কোন পাখী গান।

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# La Belle Dame Sans Merci

John Keats

[Published in the year 1820]

Ah, what can ail thee, wretched wight,  
Alone and palely loitering;  
The sedge is wither'd from the lake,  
And no birds sing.

Ah, what can ail thee, wretched wight,  
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 cheek 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 set her on my pacing steed,  
And nothing else saw all day long;  
For sideways would she lean, and sing  
A faery's song.

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.

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 gaz'd and sighed deep,  
And there I shut her wild sad eyes--  
So kiss'd to sleep.

And there we slumber'd on the moss,  
And there I dream'd, ah woe betide,  
The latest dream I ever dream'd  
On the cold hill side.

I saw pale kings, and princes too,  
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;  
Who cry'd--"La belle Dame sans merci  
Hath thee in thrall!"

I saw their starv'd lips in the gloam  
With horrid warning gaped wide,  
And I awoke, and found me here  
On the cold hill side.

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

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## **Explanatory notes on this poem [compiled and edited by A.H. jaffor Ullah]**

Some explanations should be made here about the mysterious nature of this poem. I found many web sites devoted to this poem. Many an artist had drawn pictures to show the wretched man and the belle who shows no mercy on her victim. Death as we understand has no merci.

Be mindful that this is one of the most talked about poem of John Keats. The romantic poet, Keats, borrowed the title from a poem written by the medieval poet, Alain Cartier. It means, the beautiful woman without mercy.

When I first read this poem I thought the pretty maiden represented death for many noble person. "La Belle Dame sans Merci" seems quite easy to understand at the narrative level. As per story, an unidentified passerby asks the man (brave) what is wrong (stanzas I-III). The man answers that he has been in love with and abandoned by a beautiful lady (stanzas IV-XII). Since Keats wrote it as a folk ballad, he chose to use simple language, focusing on one event, providing minimal details about the characters, and makes no inference. Some details are worldly and familiar, others are unearthly and strange. Consequently, the poem creates a sense of mystery which intrigued many readers.

This is also a puzzling poem to most readers. What does the poem mean? What is the nature of La Belle Dame sans Merci? What is the meaning of the distressed man's experience? Why has the man (brave), one of Keats's dreamers, been ravaged by the visionary or dream experience? What is the meaning of the dream? Was the dreamer deluded by his beloved or did he delude himself?

### Part I: The Anonymous Speaker

Most readers take the anonymous speaker at face value: he is a concerned passerby who comes upon the knight accidentally and who describes accurately and factually the condition of the knight and the place where they meet. However, is it possible that the knight's pitiful condition exists only in the mind or perception of the anonymous speaker? We have only his word that the knight looks pale, haggard, woe-begone, etc. To carry this train of thought to an extreme, we could ask whether there really is a knight. Could this entire poem be the hallucination of a madman? If we accept any of these interpretations of the anonymous speaker, is the meaning of the poem affected? Is the effectiveness of the poem affected?

### Stanzas I-II

In the first two lines of stanzas I and II, an unidentified speaker asks a question. The first line of both questions is identical ("Ah, what can ail thee, wretched wight"). The second lines differ somewhat; in stanza I, the question focuses on his physical condition ("Alone and palely loitering"); in stanza II, the question describes both the knight's physical state and his emotional state

("Haggard and woe-begone"). This repetition with slight variation is called incremental repetition and is a hallmark of the folk ballad.

This speaker sees no reason for the man's presence ("loitering") in such a horrible spot (the grass is "wither'd" and no birds sing). Even in this spot, not all life is wasteland, however; the squirrel's winter storage is full, and the harvest has been completed. In other words, there is an alternative or fulfilling life which the knight could choose. Thus lines 3 and 4 of stanzas I and II present contrasting views of life.

### Stanza III

This stanza elaborates on the person's (victim's) physical appearance and mental state, which are associated with dying and with nature. In the previous stanzas, the descriptions of nature are factual; here, nature is used metaphorically. His pallor is compared first to the whiteness of a lily, then to a rose; the rose is "fading" and quickly "withereth." The lily, of course, is a traditional symbol of death; the rose, a symbol of beauty. The knight's misery is suggested by the "dew" or perspiration on his forehead.

### Part II: The victim (a noble person - a brave or knight)

The knight's narrative consists of three units: stanzas IV-VII describe the knight's meeting and involvement with the mysterious lady; stanza VIII presents the climax (he goes with her to the "elfin grot"); the last four stanzas describe his sleep and expulsion from the grotto. The first four stanzas (IV-VII) are balanced by the last four stanzas (IX-XII). The poem returns to where it started, so that the poem has a circular movement; reinforcing the connection of the opening and the ending, Keats uses the same language.

#### Stanzas IV-IX

The roles of the victim (brave) and the lady change. In stanzas IV, V, and VI, the victim is dominant; lines 1 and 2 of each stanza describe his actions ("I met," "I made," "I set her"), and lines three and four of these three stanzas focus on the pretty lady.

But a shift in dominance occurs; stanza VII is devoted entirely to the lady

("She found" and "she said"). In stanza VIII the lady initiates the action and takes the dominant position in lines 1 and 2 ("She took me" and "she wept and sigh'd"); the victim's actions are presented in lines three and four.

## Stanzas X and XI

Eight and a half lines of this poem are devoted to his dream (the poem itself is only 48 lines long) and the last six lines are about the consequences of the dream. The men he dreams about are all men of power and achievement (kings, princes, and warriors). Their paleness associates them both with the loitering pale knight and with death; in fact, we are told that they are "death-pale." The description of her former lovers, with their starved lips and gaping mouths, is chilling. Is it appropriate that he awakens from this dream to a "cold" hill?

Can a political meaning be read into the poem based on the fact the fact that the men in his dream are all kings, princes, and warriors? Or is there a simpler explanation for their status? The knight is of their kind and class, so naturally he dreams of men like himself. Perhaps La Belle Dame sans Merci is attracted to this kind of man. Or Keats may merely be imitating the folk ballad, which is a traditional and conservative form and tends to observe class lines.

## Stanza XII

The knight uses the word "sojourn," which implies he will be there for some time. The repetition of language from stanza I also reinforces the sense of no movement in connection with the knight. Ironically, although he is not moving physically, he has "moved" or been emotionally ravaged by his dream or vision.

## The Significance of La Belle Dame sans Merci

Whereas the impact of the lady on the noble man is clear, her character remains shadowy. Why? You have a number of possibilities to choose among; which one you choose will be determined by how you read the poem.

1. We see the lady only through the knight's eyes, and he didn't know her. As a human being, he cannot fully understand the non- mortal; she is a "faery's child," sings a "faery's song," and takes him to an "elfin grot." Whether she speaks a language unknown to the victim or merely had an unfamiliar

pronunciation, the phrase suggests a problem in, if not a failure of communication. They are incompatible by nature.

2. The references to "faery" and "elfin" suggest enchantment or imagination. Her "sweet moan" and "song" represent art inspired by imagination. The lady, symbolizing imagination, takes him to an ideal world. The knight becomes enraptured by or totally absorbed in the pleasures of the imagination--the delicious foods, her song, her beauty, her love or favor ("and nothing else saw all day long"). But the imagination or visionary experience is fleeting; the human being cannot live in this realm, a fact which the dreamer chooses to ignore. The knight's refusal to let go of the joys of the imagination destroys his life in the real world.

Or is she possibly the cheating or false imagination, not true imagination? Does the food she gives him starve rather than nourish him? The men in his vision have "starved lips."

3. This possibility is a variant of choice #2. The lady represents the ideal, and the poem is about the relationship of the real and the ideal. The knight rejects the real world with its real fulfillments for an ideal which cannot exist in the real world. In giving himself entirely to the dream of the ideal, he destroys his life in the real world.

4. The lady is evil and belongs to a tradition of "femmes fatales." She seduces him with her beauty, with her accomplishments, with her avowal of love, and with sensuality ("roots of relish sweet, / And honey wild, and manna dew"). The vision of the pale men suggests she is deliberately destructive. The destructiveness of love is a common theme in the folk ballad.

5. Is the knight self-deluded? Does he enthrall himself by placing her on his horse and making garlands for her? The knight ignores warning signs: she has "wild wild" eyes, she gives him "wild" honey, she avows her love "in language strange," and she "wept and sigh'd full sore" in the elfin grotto. Also he continues to desire her, despite the wasteland he finds himself in and despite the warning of his dream.

Now that you've read some explanations, won't you agree with me that it is one of the most fascinating poem ever written by a romantic poet. John Keats is undoubtedly one of my the favorite poets. I fervently hope that many M-m forum members will read his poems written about 170 years ago. After all, it is

Keats who wrote, "A thing of beauty is a joy forever."