La Belle Dame Sans Merci

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 faery’s song.

VII.
She found me roots of relish sweet,
And honey wild, and manna dew,
And sure in language strange she said -
“THou art in thrall! I am the lady’s love.”

VIII.
She took me to her elfin grot,
And there she wept, and sigh’d fill 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’s side.

X.
I saw pale kings and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
They cried - “La Belle Dame sans Merci
Hath thee in thrall!”

XI.
I saw their starved lips in the gloam,
With horrid warning gaping 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 wither’d from the lake,
And no birds sing.

A DREAM, AFTER READING DANTE’S EPISODE
OF PAULO AND FRANCESCA

As Hermes once took to his feathers light,
When lulled Argus, baffled, swoone’d and slept,
So on a Delphic reed, my idle spright
So play’d, so charm’d, so conquer’d, so bereft
The dragon-world of all its hundred eyes;
And, seeing it asleep, so fled away -
Not to pure Ida with its snow-cold skies,
Nor unto Tempe where Jove griev’d a day;
But to that second circle of sad hell,
Where ‘mid the gust, the whirlwind, and the flaw
Of rain and hail-stones, lovers need not tell
Their sorrows. Pale were the sweet lips I saw,
Pale were the lips I kiss’d, and fair the form
I floated with, about that melancholy storm.

Ode on Melancholy

I.
NO, no, go not to Lethe, neither twist
Wolfs-bane, tight-rooted, for its poisonous wine;
Nor suffer thy pale forehead to be kiss’d
By nightshade, ruby grape of Proserpine;
Make not your rosary of yew-berries,
Nor let the beetle, nor the death-moth be
Your mournful Psyche, nor the downy owl
A partner in your sorrow’s mysteries;
For shade to shade will come too drowsily,
And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul.

II.

But when the melancholy fit shall fall
Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud,
That fosters the droop-headed flowers all,
And hides the green hill in an April shroud;
Then glut thy sorrow on a morning rose,
Or on the rainbow of the salt sand-wave,
Or on the wealth of globed peonies;
Or if thy mistress some rich anger shows,
Emprison her soft hand, and let her rave,
And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes.

II.

She dwells with Beauty - Beauty that must die;
And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh,
Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips:
Ay, in the very temple of Delight 25
Veil’d Melancholy has her sovran shrine,
Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue
Can burst Joy’s grape against his palate fine;
His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,
And be among her cloudy trophies hung.

This Living Hand

This living hand, now warm and capable
Of earnest grasping, would, if it were cold
And in the icy silence of the tomb,
So haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights
That thou wouldst wish thine own heart dry of blood
So in my veins red life might stream again,
And thou be conscience-calmed—see here it is—
I hold it towards you.