La Belle Dame Sans Merci   
by John Keats

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

**sedge**: Plant with pointed leaves and tiny flowers.

**2**O what can ail thee, knight at arms!         5   
  So haggard and so **woebegone**?    
The squirrel’s granary is full,    
  And the harvest’s done.

**woebegone**: Woeful, mournful, sorrowful.

**3**   
I see a lily on thy brow   
  With anguish moist and fever dew,         10   
And on thy cheeks a fading rose   
  Fast withereth too.

**4**   
"I met a lady in the **meads**,    
  Full beautiful—a faery’s child,    
Her hair was long, her foot was light,         15   
  And her eyes were wild.

**meads**: Meadows.

**5**   
"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.         20

**fragrant zone**: Sash for the waist.

**6**   
"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.

**7**   
"She found me roots of relish sweet,         25   
  And honey wild, and **manna dew**,    
And sure in language strange she said—    
  “I love thee true.”

**manna dew**: Edible product of various kinds of plants.

**8**   
"She took me to her elfin **grot**,    
  And there she wept, and sigh’d full sore,         30   
And there I shut her wild wild eyes    
  With kisses four.

**grot**: Cave.

**9**   
"And there she lullèd me asleep,    
  And there I dream’d—Ah! woe **betide**!    
The latest dream I ever dream’d         35   
  On the cold hill’s side.

**betide**: is about to happen

**10**   
"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!**”         40

**Thee hath in thrall**: Inverted word order. The meaning is *has you in thrall*. Some texts print this line as *Hath thee in thrall*.

**11**   
"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.

**gloam**: Twilight, dusk.

**12**   
"And this is why I sojourn here,         45   
  Alone and palely loitering,    
Though the sedge is wither’d from the lake,    
  And no birds sing."

**Questions on “La Belle Dame Sans Merci”**

1. Mark the rhyme scheme on the poem.
2. How many syllables are in each line? Which syllables are stressed? Mark the stressed syllables with accent marks ( ) above them.
3. Who are the speakers of the poem? Find evidence to support your claims.
4. What has happened to the second speaker? Again find evidence and summarize in just three bullet points. You may use line numbers.
5. What is the mood of the poem? Find three words that suggest this tone. Find three details about setting that also suggest this atmosphere.
6. Find two examples of metaphor in the poem. What does each metaphor help us to understand about the second speaker?
7. Find two examples of alliteration in the poem. How does each example of alliteration help us to understand the mood of the second speaker?
8. Based on this ballad, what do you think most ballads are about? Explain your reasoning.
9. Now, imitating the rhyme scheme and meter of the poem, write a two stanza reply from the first speaker in which you respond to the second speaker’s story.

## Sir Patrick Spens

#### The King sits in Dunfermline town, Drinking the blood-red wine; "O where shall I get a skeely skipper To sail this ship or mine?"

Then up and spake an eldern knight,   
Sat at the King's right knee:   
"Sir Patrick Spens is the best sailor   
That ever sailed the sea."

The King has written a broad letter,   
And sealed it with his hand,   
And sent it to Sir Patrick Spens,   
Was walking on the strand.

"To Noroway, to Noroway,   
To Noroway o'er the foam;   
The King's daughter of Noroway,   
'Tis thou must fetch her home."

The first line that Sir Patrick read,   
A loud laugh laughed he;   
The next line that Sir Patrick read,   
The tear blinded his ee.

"O who is this has done this deed,   
Has told the King of me,   
To send us out at this time of the year,   
To sail upon the sea?

"Be it wind, be it wet, be it hail, be it sleet,   
Our ship must sail the foam;   
The king's daughter of Noroway,   
'Tis we must fetch her home."

They hoisted their sails on Monenday morn,   
With all the speed they may;   
And they have landed in Noroway   
Upon a Wodensday

They had not been a week, a week,   
In Noroway but twae,   
When that the lords of Noroway   
Began aloud to say, -

"Ye Scottishmen spend all our King's gowd,   
And all our Queenis fee."   
"Ye lie, ye lie, ye liars loud!   
So loud I hear ye lie.

"For I brought as much of the white monie   
As gane my men and me,   
And a half-fou of the good red gowd   
Out o'er the sea with me.

"Make ready, make ready, my merry men all,   
Our good ship sails the morn."   
"Now, ever alack, my master dear   
I fear a deadly storm.

"I saw the new moon late yestreen   
With the old moon in her arm;   
And if we go to sea, master,   
I fear we'll come to harm."

They had not sailed a league, a league,   
A league but barely three,   
When the lift grew dark, and the wind blew loud,   
And gurly grew the sea.

The ankers brake and the top-masts lap,   
It was such a deadly storm;   
And the waves came o'er the broken ship   
Till all her sides were torn.

"O where will I get a good sailor   
Will take my helm in hand,   
Till I get up to the tall top-mast   
To see if I can spy land?"

"O here am I, a sailor good,   
Will take the helm in hand,   
Till you go up to the tall top-mast,   
But I fear you'll ne'er spy land."

He had not gone a step, a step,   
A step but barely ane,   
When a bolt flew out of the good ship's side,   
And the salt sea came in.

"Go fetch a web of the silken cloth,   
Another of the twine,   
And wap them into our good ship's side,   
And let not the sea come in."

They fetched a web of the silken cloth,   
Another of the twine,   
And they wapp'd them into the good ship's side,   
But still the sea came in.

O loth, both, were our good Scots lords   
To wet their cork-heel'd shoon,   
But long ere all the play was play'd   
They wet their hats aboon.

And many was the feather-bed   
That fluttered on the foam;   
And many was the good lord's son   
That never more came home.

The ladies wrang their fingers white,   
The maidens tore their heair,   
All for the sake of their true loves,   
For them they'll see nae mair.

O lang, lang may the maidens sit   
With their gold combs in their hair,   
All waiting for their own dear loves,   
For them they'll see nae mair.

O forty miles of Aberdeen,   
'Tis fifty fathoms deep;   
And there lies good Sir Patrick Spens,   
With the Scots lords at his feet.

# The Cremation of Sam McGee

# by Robert William Service

*There are strange things done in the midnight sun  
By the men who moil for gold,  
And the arctic trails have their secret tales  
That would make your blood run cold.*

*The northern lights have seen queer sights,  
But the queerest they ever did see  
Was the night on the marge of Lake LaBarge  
I cremated Sam McGee.*

Now, Sam McGee was from Tennessee  
Where the cotton blooms and blows.  
Why he left his home in the south to roam  
’Round the pole, God only knows.

He was always cold, but the land of gold  
Seemed to hold him like a spell,  
Though he’d often say, in his homely way,  
He’d sooner live in hell.

On a Christmas day we were mushing our way  
Over the Dawson Trail.  
Talk of your cold—through the parka’s fold  
It stabbed like a driven nail.

If our eyes we’d close, then the lashes froze  
’Till sometimes we couldn’t see.  
It wasn’t much fun, but the only one  
To whimper was Sam McGee.

And that very night as we lay packed tight  
In our robes beneath the snow,  
And the dogs were fed, and the stars o’erhead  
Were dancing heel and toe,

He turned to me, and “Cap”, says he,  
“I’ll cash in this trip, I guess,  
And if I do, I’m asking that you  
Won’t refuse my last request.”

Well, he seemed so low I couldn’t say no,  
And he says with a sort of moan,  
“It’s the cursed cold, and it’s got right hold  
’Till I’m chilled clean through to the bone.

Yet ’ta’int being dead, it’s my awful dread  
Of the icy grave that pains,  
So I want you to swear that, foul or fair,  
You’ll cremate my last remains.”

A pal’s last need is a thing to heed,  
And I swore that I would not fail.  
We started on at the streak of dawn,  
But, God, he looked ghastly pale.

He crouched on the sleigh, and he raved all day  
Of his home in Tennessee,  
And before nightfall, a corpse was all  
That was left of Sam McGee.

There wasn’t a breath in that land of death  
As I hurried, horror driven,  
With a corpse half hid that I couldn’t get rid  
Because of a promise given.

It was lashed to the sleigh, and it seemed to say,  
“You may tax your brawn and brains,  
But you promised true, and it’s up to you  
To cremate those last remains.”

Now, a promise made is a debt unpaid,  
And the trail has its own stern code.  
In the days to come, ’though my lips were dumb,  
In my heart, how I cursed the load.

In the long, long night by the lone firelight  
While the huskies ’round in a ring  
Howled out their woes to the homeless snows  
Oh, God, how I loathed the thing.

And every day that quiet clay  
Seemed to heavy and heavier grow.  
And on I went, though the dogs were spent  
And the grub was getting low.

The trail was bad, and I felt half mad,  
But I swore I would not give in,  
And often I’d sing to the hateful thing,  
And it hearkened with a grin.

’Till I came to the marge of Lake LaBarge,  
And a derelict there lay.  
It was jammed in the ice, and I saw in a trice  
It was called the “Alice May.”

I looked at it, and I thought a bit,  
And I looked at my frozen chum,  
Then, “Here”, said I, with a sudden cry,  
“Is my crematorium.”

Some planks I tore from the cabin floor  
And lit the boiler fire.  
Some coal I found that was lying around  
And heaped the fuel higher.

The flames just soared, and the furnace roared,  
Such a blaze you seldom see.  
Then I burrowed a hole in the glowing coal  
And I stuffed in Sam McGee.

Then I made a hike, for I didn’t like  
To hear him sizzle so.  
And the heavens scowled, and the huskies howled,  
And the wind began to blow.

It was icy cold, but the hot sweat rolled  
Down my cheek, and I don’t know why,  
And the greasy smoke in an inky cloak  
Went streaking down the sky.

I do not know how long in the snow  
I wrestled with gristly fear.  
But the stars came out, and they danced about  
’Ere again I ventured near.

I was sick with dread, but I bravely said,  
“I’ll just take a peek inside.  
I guess he’s cooked, and it’s time I looked,”  
And the door I opened wide.

And there sat Sam, looking calm and cool  
In the heart of the furnace roar.  
He wore a smile you could see a mile,  
And he said, “Please close that door.

It’s fine in here, but I greatly fear  
You’ll let in the cold and storm.  
Since I left Plumbtree down in Tennessee  
It’s the first time I’ve been warm.”

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By the men who moil for gold,  
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But the queerest they ever did see  
Was the night on the marge of Lake LaBarge  
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**Use this sheet to help you brainstorm and check your first draft. Typed first drafts of ballads are due at the start of class tomorrow.**

* A ballad tells a story about a hero who meets with a tragic end.
  + What is the story line (triggering action, climax, resolution) of **either** “La Belle Dame Sans Merci,” “Sir Patrick Spens,” or “SamMcGee”?
  + Who might your hero be? Why might s/he meet with a tragic end?
* The stories are generally sad or violent—sometimes in a vaguely humorous way, because the stories are often fantastical.
  + What fantastical elements are there in either “Sir Patrick Spens,” “La Belle Dame Sans Merci,” or “SamMcGee”?
  + What fantastical elements will you include in your ballad?
* Ballads are often “set” in a place that is described using sensory details to create clear mood.
  + What details about the setting of **either** “Sir Patrick Spens,” “La Belle Dame sans Merci,” or “Sam McGee” create a particular mood? What is that mood?
  + Where will your ballad be “set”? What mood do you want to create?
* The rhyme scheme of each stanza should be ABCB (that is of the four lines in each stanza, the second and last lines rhyme.) Remember to use a combination of perfect and slant rhymes. Look at “La Belle Dames sans Merci” for examples of slant rhyme.
* **Try** to make the meter follow that of a standard ballad: tetrameter, trimeter, tetrameter, trimeter. Remember: a ballad comes from the oral tradition, so you’ll have to “tune your ear” a bit to the rhythm. In other words, once you’ve written your draft, read it aloud, first to yourself and then to someone else to hear awkward parts.
* Ballads employ a variety of voices (both through dialogue and dialect) to make their characters come to life. Where will you use dialogue (or even dialect) in your ballad?
* Ballads include a refrain (a chorus) that introduces the narrator’s perspective on the story described in the rest of the ballad (ex. “Sam McGee”), established mood and setting (ex. “Jabberwocky”), or poses a question to the ballad’s hero (ex. “La Belle Dame Sans Merci”)
* The ballad should include either dialect or dialogue. You choose. (Or include both!)
* You should have at least 12 stanzas in your ballad.