

*The theatre is the House of Life. Woman the mummer's part:
The Devil enters the prompter's box and the play is ready to start.*

The Lure of Little Voices

There's a cry from out the Loneliness—Oh, listen, Honey, listen!

Do you hear it, do you fear it, you're a-holding of me so?

You're a-sobbing in your sleep, dear, and your lashes, how they glisten—

Do you hear the Little Voices all a-begging me to go?

All a-begging me to leave you. Day and night they're pleading, praying,

On the North-wind, on the West-wind, from the peak and from the plain;

Night and day they never leave me—do you know what they are saying?

"He was ours before you got him, and we want him once again."

Yes, they're wanting me, they're haunting me, the awful lonely places;

They're whining and they're whispering as if each had a soul;

They're calling from the wilderness, the vast and god-like spaces,

The stark and sullen solitudes that sentinel the Pole.

They miss my little camp-fires, ever brightly, bravely gleaming

In the womb of desolation where was never man before;

As comrades I sought them, lion-hearted, loving, dreaming;

And they hailed me as a comrade, and they loved me evermore.

And now they're all a-crying, and it's no use me denying:

The spell of them is on me and I'm helpless as a child;

My heart is aching, aching, but I hear them sleeping, waking;

It's the Lure of Little Voices, it's the mandate of the Wild.

I'm afraid to tell you, Honey, I can take no bitter leaving;

But softly in the sleep-time from your love I'll steal away.

Oh, it's cruel, dearest, cruel, and it's God knows how I'm grieving;

But His Loneliness is calling and He knows I must obey.

The Song of the Wage-Slave

When the long, long day is over, and the Big Boss gives me my pay,
 I hope that it won't be hell-fire, as some of the parsons say.
 And I hope that it won't be heaven, with some of the parsons I've met—
 All I want is just quiet, just to rest and forget.
 Look at my face, toil-furrowed; look at my calloused hands;
 Master, I've done Thy bidding, wrought in Thy many lands—
 Wrought for the little masters, big-bellied they be, and rich;
 I've done their desire for a daily hire, and I die like a dog in a ditch.
 I have used the strength Thou hast given, Thou knowest I did not shrink;
 Threescore years of labour—Thine be the long day's work.
 And now, Big Master, I'm broken and bent and twisted and scared,
 But I've held my job, and Thou knowest, and Thou wilt not judge me hard.
 Thou knowest my sins are many, and often I've played the fool—
 Whiskey and cards and women, they made me the devil's tool.
 I was just like a child with money: I flung it away with a curse,
 Fasting a fawning parasite, or glutting a harlot's purse,
 Then back to the woods repentant, back to the mill or the mine,
 I, the worker of workers, everything in my line.
 Everything hard but headwork (I'd no more brains than a kid),
 A brute with brute strength to labour, doing as I was bid;
 Living in camps with men-folk, a lonely and loveless life;
 Never knew kiss of sweetheart, never caress of wife.
 A brute with brute strength to labour, and they were so far above—
 Yet I'd gladly have gone to the gallows for one little look of Love.
 I with the strength of two men, savage and shy and wild—
 Yet how I'd ha' treasured a woman, and the sweet, warm kiss of a child.
 Well, 'tis Thy world, and Thou knowest. I blaspheme and my ways be rude;
 But I've lived my life as I found it, and I've done my best to be good;
 I, the primitive toiler, half naked, and grimed to the eyes,
 Sweating it deep in their ditches, swining it stark in their styes,
 Hulling down forests before me, spanning tumultuous streams;
 Down in the ditch building o'er me palaces fairer than dreams;
 Boring the rock to the ore-bed, driving the road through the fen,
 Resolute, dumb, uncomplaining, a man in a world of men.
 Master, I've filled my contract, wrought in Thy many lands;
 Not by my sins wilt Thou judge me, but by the work of my hands.
 Master, I've done Thy bidding, and the light is low in the west,
 And the long, long shift is over ... Master, I've earned it—Rest.

The Harry

*There was a woman, and she was wise; woefully wise was she;
 She was old, so old, yet her years all told were but a score and three;
 And she knew by heart, from finish to start, the Book of Iniquity.*

There is no hope for such as I, on earth not yet in Heaven;
 Unloved I live, unloved I die, unpitied, unforgiven;
 A loathed jade I ply my trade, unhallowed and unshriven.

I paint my cheeks, for they are white, and cheeks of chalk men hate;
 Mine eyes with wine I make to shine, that men may seek and sate;
 With overhead a lamp of red I sit me down and wait.

Until they come, the nightly scum, with drunken eyes aflame;
 Your sweethearts, sons, ye scornful ones—'tis I who know their shame;
 The gods ye see are brutes to me—and so I play my game.

For life is not the thing we thought, and not the thing we plan;
 And woman in a bitter world must do the best she can;
 Must yield the stroke, and bear the yoke, and serve the will of man;

Must serve his need and ever feed the flame of his desire;
 Though be she loved for love alone, or be she loved for hire;
 For every man since life began is tainted with the mire.

And though you know he love you so, and set you on love's throne,
 Yet let your eyes but mock his sighs, and let your heart be stone,
 Lest you be left (as I was left) attainted and alone.

From love's close kiss to hell's abyss is one sheer flight, I throw;
 And wedding-ring and bridal bell are will-o'-wisps of woe;
 And 'tis not wise to love too well, and this all women know.

Wherefore, the wolf-pack having gorged upon the lamb, their prey,
 With siren smile and serpent guile I make the wolf-pack pay;
 With velvet paws and flensing claws, a tigress roused to slay.

One who in youth sought truest truth, and found a devil's lies;
 A symbol of the sin of man, a human sacrifice:
 Yet shall I blame on man the shame? Could it be otherwise?

Was I not born to walk in scorn where others walk in pride?
 The Maker married, and evil-starred I drift upon His tide;
 And He alone shall judge His own, so I His judgment bide.

Fate has written a tragedy; its name is "The Human Heart."

in the valley's lap we lie;
 From the white foam-fringe where the breakers
 cringe to the peaks that tusk the sky
 We climb, and we peer in the crag-locked mere
 that gleams like a golden eye,—

Gain to the verge of the hog-back ridge where the
 vision ranges free:

Pines and pines and the shadow of pines as far as
 the eye can see;

A steadfast legion of stalwart knights in
 dominant empery.

Sun, moon and stars, give answer; shall we not
 staunchly stand

Even as now, forever, wards of the wilder strand,
 Sentinels of the stillness, lords of the last lone land!

Grin

If you're up against a bruiser and you're getting knocked about—
Grin.

If you're feeling pretty groggy, and you're licked beyond a doubt—
Grin.

Don't let him see you're funkling, let him know with every clout,
 Though your face is battered to a pulp, your blooming heart is stout;
 Just stand upon your pins until the beggar knocks you out—
And grin.

This life's a bally battle, and the same advice holds true,
Of grin.

If you're up against it badly, then it's only one on you,
So grin.

If the future's black as thunder, don't let people see you're blue;
 Just cultivate a cast-iron smile of joy the whole day through;
 If they call you "Little Sunshine," wish that *they'd* no troubles, too—
You may—grin.

Rise up in the morning with the will that, smooth or rough,
You'll grin.

Sink to sleep at midnight, and although you're feeling tough,
Yet grin.

There's nothing gained by whining, and you're not that kind of stuff;
 You're a fighter from away back, and you *won't* take a rebuff;
 Your trouble is that you don't know when you have had enough—
Don't give in.

If Fate should down you, just get up and take another cuff;
 You may bank on it that there is no philosophy like bluff
And grin.

The Shooting of Dan McGrew

A bunch of the boys were whooping it up in the Malamute saloon;
 The kid that handles the music-box was hitting a jag-time tune;
 Back of the bar, in a solo game, sat Dangerous Dan McGrew,
 And watching his luck was his light-o'-love, the lady that's known as Lou.

When out of the night, which was fifty below, and in to the din and the glare,
 There stumbled a miner fresh from the creeks, dog-dirty and loaded for bear.
 He looked like a man with a foot in the grave, and scarcely the strength of a louse,
 Yet he tilted a poke of dust on the bar, and he called for drinks for the house.
 There was none could place the stranger's face, though we searched ourselves for a
 clue;
 But we drank his health, and the last to drink was Dangerous Dan McGrew.

There's men that somehow just grip your eyes, and hold them hard like a spell;
 And such was he, and he looked to me like a man who had lived in hell;
 With a face most hair, and the dreary stare of a dog whose day is done,
 As he watered the green stuff in his glass, and the drops fell one by one.
 Then I got to figuring who he was, and wondering what he'd do,
 And I turned my head—and there watching him was the lady that's known as Lou.

His eyes went rubbering round the room, and he seemed in a kind of daze,
 Till at last that old piano fell in the way of his wandering gaze.
 The rag-time kid was having a drink; there was no one else on the stool,
 So the stranger stumbles across the room, and flops down there like a fool.
 In a buckskin shirt that was glazed with dirt he sat, and I saw him sway;
 Then he clunched the keys with his talon hands—my God! but that man could
 play!

Were you ever out in the Great Alone, when the moon was awful clear,
 And the icy mountains hemmed you in with a silence you most could hear;
 With only the howl of a timber wolf, and you camped there in the cold,
 A half-dead thing in a stark, dead world, clean mad for the muck called gold;
 While high overhead, green, yellow, and red, the North Lights swept in bars—
 Then you've a haunch what the music meant ... hunger and night and the stars.

And hunger not of the belly kind, that's banished with bacon and beans;
 But the gnawing hunger of lonely men for a home and all that it means;
 For a fireside far from the cares that are, four walls and a roof above;
 But oh! so cramful of cosy joy, and crowned with a woman's love;
 A woman dearer than all the world, and true as Heaven is true—
 (God! how ghastly she looks through her rouge—the lady that's known as Lou.)

Then on a sudden the music changed, so soft that you scarce could hear;

The Pines

We sleep in the sleep of ages, the bleak,
 barbarian pines;
 The grey moss drapes us like sages, and closer
 we lock our lines,
 And deeper we clutch through the gelid gloom
 where never a sunbeam shines.

On the flanks of the storm-gored ridges are our
 black battalions massed;
 We surge in a host to the sullen coast, and we
 sing in the ocean blast;
 From empire of sea to empire of snow we grip
 our empire fast.

To the niggard lands were we driven; 'twixt
 desert and foe are we penned.
 To us was the Northland given, ours to stronghold
 and defend;

Ours till the world be riven in the crash of the
 utter end.

Ours from the bleak beginning, through the æons
 of death-like sleep;
 Ours from the shock when the naked rock was
 hurled from the hissing deep;
 Ours through the twilight ages of weary
 glacier-creep.

Wind of the East, wind of the West, wandering
 to and fro,
 Chant your songs in our topmost boughs, that
 the sons of men may know
 The peerless pine was the first to come, and the
 pine will be last to go!

We pillar the halls of perfumed gloom; we plume
 where the eagles soar;
 The North-wind swoops from the brooding Pole,
 and our ancients crash and roar;
 But where one falls from the crumbling walls
 shoots up a hardy score.

We spring from the gloom of the canyon's womb;

The Cremation of Sam McGee

*There are strange things done in the midnight sun
By the men who moil for gold;*

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 that night on the marge of Lake Lebarge

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

That "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 overhead

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 that I couldn't say no;

Then 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 'tain't being dead—it's my awful dread

Of the icy grave that pains;

The Heart of the Sourdough

There where the mighty mountains bare their fangs unto the moon;

There where the sullen sun-dogs glare in the snow-bright, bitter noon,

And the glacier-gutted streams sweep down at the clarion call of June:

There where the livid tundras keep their tryst with the tranquil snows;

There where the Silences are spawned, and the light of hell-fire flows

Into the bowl of the midnight sky, violet, amber, and rose:

There where the rapids churn and roar, and the ice-floes bellowing run;

Where the tortured, twisted rivers of blood rush to the setting sun—

I've packed my kit and I'm going, boys, ere another day is done.

I knew it would call, or soon or late, as it calls the whirling wings;

It's the olden lure, it's the golden lure, it's the lure of the timeless things;

And to-night, O God of the trails untrod, how it whines in my heart-strings!

I'm sick to death of your well-groomed gods, your make-believe and your show;

I long for a whiff of bacon and beans, a snug shake-down in the snow,

A trail to break, and a life at stake, and another bout with the foe;

With the raw-ribbed Wild that abhors all life, the wild that would crush and rend;

I have clinched and closed with the naked North, I have learned to defy and defend;

Shoulder to shoulder we've fought it out—yet the Wild must win in the end.

I have floured the Wild. I have followed its lure, fearless, familiar, alone;

By all that the battle means and makes I claim that land for mine own;

Yet the Wild must win, and a day will come when I shall be overthrown.

Then when as wolf-dogs fight we've fought, the lean wolf-land and I;

Fought and bled till the snows are red under the reeling sky;

Even as lean wolf-dog goes down will I go down and die.

The Lone Trail

Ye who know the Lone Trail fain would follow it,

Though it lead to glory or the darkness of the pit.

Ye who take the Lone Trail, bid your love good-bye;

The Lone Trail, the Lone Trail follow till you die.

The trails of the world be countless, and most of the trails be tried;

You tread on the heels of the many, till you come where the ways divide;

And one lies safe in the sunlight, and the other is dreary and wan,

Yet you look askant at the Lone Trail, and the Lone Trail lures you on.

And somehow you're sick of the highway, with its noise and its easy needs,

And you seek the risk of the by-way, and you reck not where it leads.

And sometimes it leads to the desert, and the tongue swells out of the mouth,

And you stagger blind to the mirage, to die in the mocking drouth.

And sometimes it leads to the mountain, to the light of the lone camp-fire,

And you gnaw your belt in the anguish of hunger-goaded desire.

And sometimes it leads to the Southland, to the swamp where the orchid glows,

And you rave to your grave with the fever, and they rob the corpse for its clothes.

And sometimes it leads to the Northland, and the scurvy softens your bones,

And your flesh dints in like puty, and you spit out your teeth like stones.

And sometimes it leads to a coral reef in the wash of a weedy sea,

And you sit and stare at the empty glare where the gulls wait greedily.

And sometimes it leads to an Arctic trail, and the snows where your torn feet freeze,

And you whittle away the useless clay, and crawl on your hands and knees.

Often it leads to the dead-pit; always it leads to pain;

By the bones of your brothers ye know it, but oh, to follow you're fain.

By your bones they will follow behind you, till the ways of the world are made plain.

Bid good-bye to sweetheart, bid good-bye to friend;

The Lone Trail, the Lone Trail follow to the end.

Tarry not, and fear not, chosen of the true;

Lover of the Lone Trail, the Lone Trail waits for you.

- 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,

So I swore I would not fail;

And 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,

And 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 that 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—

O 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 I'd often sing to the hateful thing,

And it hearkened with a grin.

- Till I came to the marge of Lake LeBarge,

And a derelict there lay;

It was jammed in the ice, but I saw in a trice

It was called the "Alice May."

- And 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 I lit the boiler fire;
Some coal I found that was lying around,

And I heaped the fuel higher;
The flames just soared, and the furnace roared—
Such a blaze you seldom see;
And 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 cheeks, 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 grisly 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 peep inside.
I guess he's cooked, and it's time I looked."
... Then the door I opened wide.

And there sat Sam, looking cool and calm,
In the heart of the furnace roar;
And 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 Plumtree, down in Tennessee,
It's the first time I've been warm."

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

There's a whisper on the night-wind, there's a star agleam to guide us,
And the wild is calling; calling ... let us go.