



**THE SPELL OF
THE YUKON
AND OTHER VERSES**

ROBERT W. SERVICE

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**BY
ROBERT W. SERVICE**

1907

The Spell of the Yukon and Other Verses By Robert W. Service.

This edition was created and published by Global Grey

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Then Magersfontein, and supreme command
Over his Highlanders. To shake his hand
A King is proud, and princes call him friend.
And glory crowns his life — and now the end,

The awful end. His eyes are dark with doom;
He hears the shrapnel shrieking overhead;
He sees the ravaged ranks, the flame-stabbed gloom.
Oh, to have fallen! — the battle-field his bed,
With Wauchope and his glorious brother-dead.
Why was he saved for this, for this? And now
He raises the revolver to his brow.

In many a Highland home, framed with rude art,
You'll find his portrait, rough-hewn, stern and square;
It's graven in the Fuyam fellah's heart;
The Ghurka reads it at his evening prayer;
The raw lands know it, where the fierce suns glare;
The Dervish fears it. Honor to his name
Who holds aloft the shield of England's fame.

Mourn for our hero, men of Northern race!

We do not know his sin; we only know
His sword was keen. He laughed death in the face,
And struck, for Empire's sake, a giant blow.
His arm was strong. Ah! well they learnt, the foe
The echo of his deeds is ringing yet —
Will ring for aye. All else... let us forget.

THE WOMAN AND THE ANGEL

An angel was tired of heaven, as he lounged in the golden street;
His halo was tilted sideways, and his harp lay mute at his feet;
So the Master stooped in His pity, and gave him a pass to go,
For the space of a moon, to the earth-world, to mix with the men below.

He doffed his celestial garments, scarce waiting to lay them straight;
He bade good by to Peter, who stood by the golden gate;
The sexless singers of heaven chanted a fond farewell,
And the imps looked up as they pattered on the red-hot flags of hell.

Never was seen such an angel — eyes of heavenly blue,
Features that shamed Apollo, hair of a golden hue;
The women simply adored him; his lips were like Cupid's bow;
But he never ventured to use them — and so they voted him slow.

Till at last there came One Woman, a marvel of loveliness,
And she whispered to him: "Do you love me?"

And he answered that woman, "Yes."

And she said: "Put your arms around me, and kiss me, and hold me — so —
"

But fiercely he drew back, saying: "This thing is wrong, and I know."

Then sweetly she mocked his scruples, and softly she him beguiled:

"You, who are verily man among men, speak with the tongue of a child.

We have outlived the old standards; we have burst, like an over-tight thong,

The ancient, outworn, Puritanic traditions of Right and Wrong."

Then the Master feared for His angel, and called him again to His side,

For oh, the woman was wondrous, and oh, the angel was tried!

And deep in his hell sang the Devil, and this was the strain of his song:

"The ancient, outworn, Puritanic traditions of Right and Wrong."

THE RHYME OF THE RESTLESS ONES

We couldn't sit and study for the law;
The stagnation of a bank we couldn't stand;
For our riot blood was surging, and we didn't need much urging
To excitements and excesses that are banned.
So we took to wine and drink and other things,
And the devil in us struggled to be free;
Till our friends rose up in wrath, and they pointed out the path,
And they paid our debts and packed us o'er the sea.

Oh, they shook us off and shipped us o'er the foam,
To the larger lands that lure a man to roam;
And we took the chance they gave
Of a far and foreign grave,
And we bade good-by for evermore to home.

And some of us are climbing on the peak,
And some of us are camping on the plain;
By pine and palm you'll find us, with never claim to bind us,
By track and trail you'll meet us once again.

We are the fated serfs to freedom — sky and sea;

We have failed where slummy cities overflow;
But the stranger ways of earth know our pride and know our worth,
And we go into the dark as fighters go.

Yes, we go into the night as brave men go,
Though our faces they be often streaked with woe;
Yet we're hard as cats to kill,
And our hearts are reckless still,
And we've danced with death a dozen times or so.

And you'll find us in Alaska after gold,
And you'll find us herding cattle in the South.
We like strong drink and fun, and, when the race is run,
We often die with curses in our mouth.
We are wild as colts unbroke, but never mean.
Of our sins we've shoulders broad to bear the blame;
But we'll never stay in town and we'll never settle down,
And we'll never have an object or an aim.

No, there's that in us that time can never tame;
And life will always seem a careless game;
And they'd better far forget —
Those who say they love us yet —

Forget, blot out with bitterness our name.

NEW YEAR'S EVE

It's cruel cold on the water-front, silent and dark and drear;
Only the black tide weltering, only the hissing snow;
And I, alone, like a storm-tossed wreck, on this night of the glad New Year,
Shuffling along in the icy wind, ghastly and gaunt and slow.

They're playing a tune in McGuffy's saloon,
and it's cheery and bright in there
(God! but I'm weak — since the bitter dawn, and never a bite of food);
I'll just go over and slip inside — I mustn't give way to despair —
Perhaps I can bum a little booze if the boys are feeling good.

They'll jeer at me, and they'll sneer at me,
and they'll call me a whiskey soak;
("Have a drink? Well, thankee kindly, sir, I don't mind if I do.")
A drivelling, dirty, gin-joint fiend, the butt of the bar-room joke;
Sunk and sodden and hopeless — "Another? Well, here's to you!"

McGuffy is showing a bunch of the boys how Bob Fitzsimmons hit;
The barman is talking of Tammany Hall, and why the ward boss got fired.
I'll just sneak into a corner and they'll let me alone a bit;
The room is reeling round and round...

O God! but I'm tired, I'm tired....

Roses she wore on her breast that night. Oh, but their scent was sweet!

Alone we sat on the balcony, and the fan-palms arched above;

The witching strain of a waltz by Strauss came up to our cool retreat,

And I prisoned her little hand in mine, and I whispered my plea of love.

Then sudden the laughter died on her lips, and lowly she bent her head;

And oh, there came in the deep, dark eyes a look that was heaven to see;

And the moments went, and I waited there, and never a word was said,

And she plucked from her bosom a rose of red and shyly gave it to me.

Then the music swelled to a crash of joy, and the lights blazed up like day,

And I held her fast to my throbbing heart, and I kissed her bonny brow.

"She is mine, she is mine for evermore!" the violins seemed to say,

And the bells were ringing the New Year in — O God! I can hear them now.

Don't you remember that long, last waltz, with its sobbing, sad refrain?

Don't you remember that last good-by, and the dear eyes dim with tears?

Don't you remember that golden dream, with never a hint of pain,

Of lives that would blend like an angel-song

in the bliss of the coming years?

Oh, what have I lost! What have I lost! Ethel, forgive, forgive!

The red, red rose is faded now, and it's fifty years ago.

'Twere better to die a thousand deaths than live each day as I live!

I have sinned, I have sunk to the lowest depths —

but oh, I have suffered so!

Hark! Oh, hark! I can hear the bells!... Look! I can see her there,

Fair as a dream... but it fades... And now —

I can hear the dreadful hum

Of the crowded court... See! the Judge looks down...

NOT GUILTY, my Lord, I swear...

The bells — I can hear the bells again!... Ethel, I come, I come!...

"Rouse up, old man, it's twelve o'clock. You can't sleep here, you know.

Say! ain't you got no sentiment? Lift up your muddled head;

Have a drink to the glad New Year, a drop before you go —

You darned old dirty hobo... My God! Here, boys! He's DEAD!"

Even to win is to fail.
Still you must follow and fight
Under the vampire wing;
There in the long, long night
Hoping and vanquishing.

Husbandman of the Wild,
Reaping a barren gain;
Scourged by desire, reconciled
Unto disaster and pain;
These, my songs, are for you,
You who are seared with the brand.
God knows I have tried to be true;
Please God you will understand.

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