

# **SONGS OF A SOURDOUGH**

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Songs of a Sourdough by Robert W. Service

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**ROBERT W. SERVICE**

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SOURDOUGH**



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BY  
Robert W. Service



AUTHOR'S EDITION  
WILLIAM BRIGGS  
TORONTO  
1907

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## Songs of a Sourdough

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### THE LAW OF THE YUKON.

THIS is the law of the Yukon, and ever she makes it plain:

“Send not your foolish and feeble ; send me your strong and your sane.

Strong for the red rage of battle ; sane, for I harry them sore ;

Send me men girt for the combat, men who are grit to the core ;

Swift as the panther in triumph, fierce as the bear in defeat,

Sired of a bulldog parent, steeled in the furnace heat.

Send me the best of your breeding, lend me your chosen ones ;

Them will I take to my bosom, them will I call my sons ;



Them will I gild with my treasure, them will I glut  
with my meat;  
But the others—the misfits, the failures—I trample  
under my feet.  
Dissolute, damned and despairful, crippled and palsied  
and slain,  
Ye would send me the spawn of your gutters—Go!  
take back your spawn again.

“ Wild and wide are my borders, stern as death is my  
sway;  
From my ruthless throne I have ruled alone for a  
million years and a day;  
Hugging my mighty treasure, waiting for man to come:  
Till he swept like a turbid torrent, and after him swept  
—the scum.  
The pallid pimp of the dead-line, the enervate of the  
pen,  
One by one I weeded them out, for all that I sought  
was—Men.  
One by one I dismayed them, frightening them sore with  
my glooms;  
One by one I betrayed them unto my manifold dooms.  
Drowned them like rats in my rivers, starved them  
like curs on my plains,  
Rotted the flesh that was left them, poisoned the blood  
in their veins;

Burst with my winter upon them, searing forever their  
sight,  
Lashed them with fungus-white faces, whimpering wild  
in the night;  
Staggering blind through the storm-whirl, stumbling  
mad through the snow,  
Frozen stiff in the ice pack, brittle and bent like a bow;  
Featureless, formless, forsaken, scented by wolves in  
their flight,  
Left for the wind to make music through ribs that are  
glittering white;  
Gnawing the black crust of failure, searching the pit  
of despair,  
Crooking the toe in the trigger, trying to patter a  
prayer;  
Going outside with an escort, raving with lips all  
afoam;  
Writing a cheque for a million, drivelling feebly of  
home;  
Lost like a louse in the burning . . . or else in the  
tented town  
Seeking a drunkard's solace, sinking and sinking down;  
Steeped in the slime at the bottom, dead to a decent  
world,  
Lost 'mid the human flotsam, far on the frontier  
hurled;

In the camp at the bend of the river, with its dozen  
    saloons aglare,  
Its gambling dens ariot, its gramophones all ablare;  
Crimped with the crimes of a city, sin-ridden and  
    brilled with lies,  
In the bush of my mountained vastness, in the flush  
    of my midnight skies.  
Plague-spots, yet tools of my purpose, so natheless I  
    suffer them thrive,  
Crushing my Weak in their clutches, that only my  
    Strong may survive.

“ But the others, the men of my mettle, the men who  
    would 'stablish my fame,  
Unto its ultimate issue, winning me honor, not shame;  
Searching my uttermost valleys, fighting each step as  
    they go,  
Shooting the wrath of my rapids, scaling my ramparts  
    of snow;  
Ripping the guts of my mountains, looting the beds of  
    my creeks,  
Them will I take to my bosom, and speak as a mother  
    speaks.  
I am the land that listens, I am the land that broods;  
Steeped in eternal beauty, crystalline waters and woods.