

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-by;
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 aslant 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-godded 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 putty, 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-by to sweetheart, bid good-by 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.

--- Robert Service

The Call of the Wild

Have you gazed on naked grandeur where there's nothing else to gaze on,
Set pieces and drop-curtain scenes galore,
Big mountains heaved to heaven, which the blinding sunsets blazon,
Black canyons where the rapids rip and roar?
Have you swept the visioned valley with the green stream streaking through it,
Searched the Vastness for a something you have lost?
Have you strung your soul to silence? Then for God's sake go and do it;
Hear the challenge, learn the lesson, pay the cost.

Have you wandered in the wilderness, the sagebrush desolation,
The bunch-grass levels where the cattle graze?
Have you whistled bits of rag-time at the end of all creation,
And learned to know the desert's little ways?
Have you camped upon the foothills, have you galloped o'er the ranges,
Have you roamed the arid sun-lands through and through?
Have you chummed up with the mesa? Do you know its moods and changes?
Then listen to the Wild -- it's calling you.

Have you known the Great White Silence, not a snow-gemmed twig aquiver?
(Eternal truths that shame our soothing lies.)
Have you broken trail on snowshoes? mushed your huskies up the river,
Dared the unknown, led the way, and clutched the prize?
Have you marked the map's void spaces, mingled with the mongrel races,
Felt the savage strength of brute in every thew?
And though grim as hell the worst is, can you round it off with curses?
Then hearken to the Wild -- it's wanting you.

Have you suffered, starved and triumphed, groveled down, yet grasped at glory,
Grown bigger in the bigness of the whole?
"Done things" just for the doing, letting babblers tell the story,
Seeing through the nice veneer the naked soul?
Have you seen God in His splendors, heard the text that nature renders?
(You'll never hear it in the family pew.)
The simple things, the true things, the silent men who do things --
Then listen to the Wild -- it's calling you.

They have cradled you in custom, they have primed you with their preaching,
They have soaked you in convention through and through;
They have put you in a showcase; you're a credit to their teaching --
But can't you hear the Wild? -- it's calling you.
Let us probe the silent places, let us seek what luck betide us;
Let us journey to a lonely land I know.
There's a whisper on the night-wind, there's a star a gleam to guide us,
And the Wild is calling, calling . . . let us go.

--- Robert Service

The Choice

. . . And then I came to Three ways,
And each was mine to choose;
For all of them were free ways,
To take or to refuse.
"Now which shall be the best way,
East, West or South?" said I . . .
So then I went the West way -
I often wonder why.

. . . And then I came to Two ways,
And each was luring me:
For both of them were new ways,
And I was fancy free.
"Now which shall be the least way,"
Said I: "to gain my goal?"
And so I took the East way,
With freedom in my soul.

. . . And then I came to One way,
And to the South it ran;
Then lo! I saw this sun way
Was mine since time began;
My pitiless, my doom way;
No other could there be,
For at its end my tomb lay,
And it was waiting me. . . .
Poor fools! Who think you're free.

--- Robert Service

Dauntless Quest

by Robert W. Service

Why seek to scale Mount Everest,

Queen of the air?

Why strive to crown that cruel crest

And deathward dare?

Said Mallory of dauntless quest:

"Because it's there."

Why yearn with passion and with pain

To storm the sky?

Why suffer, - sullen goals to gain,

And fear defy?

"'Tis not for glory or for gain

We darkly die."

Why join the reckless, roving crew

Of trail and tent?

Why grimly take the roads of rue,

To doom hell-bent?

Columbus, Cook and Cabot knew,

And yet they went."

Why bid the woolly world goodbye

To follow far,

Adventures under evil sky

And sullen star?

Let men like Mallory reply:

"Because they are."