The Cremation of Sam McGee  
by Robert Service

|   | 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.  

| 2 | 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."  

| 3 | 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.  

| 4 | 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."  

| 5 | Well, he seemed so low that I couldn't say no; then he says with a sort of moan:  
|   | "It's the cursèd 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;  
|   | So I want you to swear that, foul or fair, you'll cremate my last remains."  

| 6 | 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.  

| 7 | 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."  

| 8 | 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 cre-ma-tor-eum."

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."

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