

Hank Snow, Ballad Of One Eyed Mike

This is the tale that was told to me by the man with the crystal eye
As I smoked my pipe in the camp-fire light and the Glories swept the sky
As the Northlights gleamed and curved and streamed and the bottle of hooch was dry

A man once aimed that my life be shamed and wrought me a deathly wrong
I vowed one day I would well repay but the heft of his hate was strong
He thonged me East and he thonged me West he harried me back and forth
Till I fled in fright from his peerless spite to the bleak bald-headed North

And there I lay and for many a day I hatched plan after plan
For a golden haul of the wherewithal to crush and to kill my man
And there I strove and there I clove through the drift of icy streams
And there I fought and there I sought for the pay-streak of my dreams

So twenty years with their hopes and fears and smiles and tears and such
Went by and left me long bereft of hope of the Midas touch
About as fat as a chancel rat and lo! despite my will
In the weary fight I had clean lost sight of the man I sought to kill

'Twas so far away that evil day when I prayed to the Prince of Gloom
For the savage strength and the sullen length of life to work his doom
Nor sign nor word had I seen or heard and it happed so long ago
My youth was gone and my memory wan and I willed it even so

It fell one night in the waning light by the Yukon's oily flow
I smoked and sat as I marvelled at the sky's port-winey glow
Till it paled away to an absinthe gray and the river seemed to shrink
All wobbly flakes and wriggling snakes and goblin eyes a-wink

'Twas weird to see and it wildered me in a queer hypnotic dream
Till I saw a spot like an inky blot come floating down the stream
It bobbed and swung it sheered and hung it romped round in a ring
It seemed to play in a tricksome way it sure was a merry thing

In freakish flights strange oily lights came fluttering round its head
Like butterflies of a monster size then I knew it for the Dead
Its face was rubbed and slicked and scrubbed as smooth as a shaven pate
In the silver snakes that the water makes it gleamed like a dinner-plate

It gurgled near and clear and clear and large and large it grew
It stood upright in a ring of light and it looked me through and through
It weltered round with a woozy sound and ere I could retreat
With the witless roll of a sodden soul it wantoned to my feet

And here I swear by this Cross I wear I heard that floater say
I am the man from whom you ran the man you sought to slay
That you may note and gaze and gloat and say revenge is sweet
In the grit and grime of the river's slime I am rotting at your feet

The ill we rue we must e'en undo though it rive us bone from bone
So it came about that I sought you out for I prayed I might atone
I did you wrong and for long and long I sought where you might live
And now you're found though I'm dead and drowned I beg you to forgive

So sad it seemed and its cheek-bones gleamed and its fingers flicked the shore
And it lapped and lay in a weary way and its hands met to implore
That I gently said poor restless dead I would never work you woe
Though the wrong you rue you can ne'er undo I forgave you long ago

Then wonder-wise I rubbed my eyes and I woke from a horrid dream
The moon rode high in the naked sky and something bobbed in the stream
It held my sight in a patch of light and then it sheered from the shore
It dipped and sank by a hollow bank and I never saw it more

This was the tale he told to me that man so warped and gray
Ere he slept and dreamed and the camp-fire gleamed in his eye in a wolfish way
That crystal eye that raked the sky in the weird Auroral ray