

Hank Snow, My Friends 1968

The man above was a murderer the man below was a thief
And I lay there in the bunk between ailing beyond belief
A weary armful of skin and bone wasted with pain and grief

My feet were froze and the lifeless toes were purple and green and gray
The little flesh that clung to my bones you could punch it in holes like clay
The skin on my gums was a sullen black and slowly peeling away

I was sure enough in a direful fix and often I wondered why
They did not take the chance that was left and leave me alone to die
Or finish me off with a dose of dope so utterly lost was I

But no they brewed me the green-spruce tea and nursed me there like a child
And the homicide he was good to me and bathed my sores and smiled
And the thief he starved that I might be fed and his eyes were kind and mild

Yet they were woefully wicked men and often at night in pain
I heard the murderer speak of his deed and dream it over again
I heard the poor thief sorrowing for the dead self he had slain

I'll never forget that bitter dawn so evil askew and gray
When they wrapped me round in the skins of beasts and bore me to a sleigh
And we started out with the nearest post a hundred miles away

I'll never forget the trail they broke with its tense unuttered woe
And the crunch crunch crunch as their snowshoes sank through the crust of the hollow snow
And my breath would fail and every beat of my heart was like a blow

And often times I would die the death yet wake up to life anew
The sun would be all ablaze on the waste and the sky a blighting blue
And the tears would rise in my snow-blind eyes and furrow my cheeks like dew

And the camps we made when their strength outplayed and the day was pinched and wan
And oh the joy of the blessed halt and I did dread the dawn
And how I hated the weary men who rose and dragged me on

And oh how I begged to rest to rest the snow was so sweet a shroud
And oh how I cried when they urged me on cried and cursed them aloud
Yet on they strained all racked and pained and sorely their backs were bowed

And then it was all like a lurid dream and I prayed for a swift release
From the ruthless ones who would not leave me to die alone in peace
Till I waked up and I found myself at the post of the Mounted Police

And there was my friend the murderer and there was my friend the thief
With bracelets of steel around their wrists and wicked beyond belief
But when they come to God's judgment seat may I be allowed the brief