

## Hank Snow

# "Ballad Of Baspheinous Bill"

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I took a contract to bury the body of blasphemous Bill  
MacKie

Whenever wherever or whatsoever the manner of  
death he die

Whether he die in the light o' day or under the peak-  
faced moon

In cabin or dance-hall camp or dive mucklucks or  
patent shoon

On velvet tundra or virgin peak by glacier drift or draw  
In muskeg hollow or canyon gloom by avalanche fang  
or claw

By battle murder or sudden wealth by pestilence hooch  
or lead

I swore on the Book I would follow and look till I found  
my tombless dead

For Bill was a dainty kind of cuss and his mind was  
mighty sot

On a dinky patch with flowers and grass in a civilized  
boneyard lot

And where he died or how he died it didn't matter a  
damn

So long as he had a grave with frills and a tombstone  
epigram

So I promised him and he paid the price in good  
cheechako coin

Which the same I blowed in that very night down in the  
Tenderloin

Then I painted a three-foot slab of pine here lies poor  
Bill MacKie

And I hung it up on my cabin wall and waited for Bill to  
die

Years passed away and at last one day came a squaw  
with a story strange

Of a long-deserted line of traps way back of the  
Bighorn range

Of a little hut by the great divide and a white man stiff  
and still

Lying there by his lonesome self and I figured it must

be Bill

So I thought of the contract I'd made with him and I  
took down from the shelf  
The swell black box with the silver plate he'd picked out  
for hisself  
And I packed it full of grub and hooch and I slung it on  
the sleigh  
Then I harnessed up my team of dogs and was off at  
dawn of day

You know what it's like in the Yukon wild when it's sixty-  
nine below  
When the ice-worms wriggle their purple heads  
through the crust of the pale blue snow  
When the pine trees crack like little guns in the silence  
of the wood  
And the icicles hang down like tusks under the parka  
hood

When the stove-pipe smoke breaks sudden off and the  
sky is weirdly lit  
And the careless feel of a bit of steel burns like a red-  
hot spit  
When the mercury is a frozen ball and the frost-fiend  
stalks to kill  
Well it was just like that that day when I set out to look  
for Bill

Oh the awful hush that seemed to crush me down on  
every hand  
As I blundered blind with a trail to find through that  
blank and bitter land  
Half dazed half crazed in the winter wild with its grim  
heartbraking woes  
And the ruthless strife for a grip on life that only the  
sourdough knows

North by the compass North I pressed river and peak  
and plain  
Passed like a dream I slept to lose and I waked to  
dream again  
River and plain and mighty peak and who could stand  
unawed  
As their summits blazed he could stand undazed at the  
foot of the throne of God  
North aye North through a land accurst shunned by the  
scouring brutes  
And all I heard was my own harsh word and the whine  
of the malamutes  
Till at last I came to a cabin squat built in the side of a

hill

And I burst in the door and there on the floor frozen to  
death lay Bill

Ice white ice like a winding-sheet sheathing each  
smoke-grimed wall  
Ice on the stove-pipe ice on the bed ice gleaming over  
all  
Sparkling ice on the dead man's chest glittering ice in  
his hair  
Ice on his fingers ice in his heart ice in his glassy stare

Hard as a log and trussed like a frog with his arms and  
legs outspread  
I gazed at the coffin I'd brought for him and I gazed at  
the gruesome dead  
And at last I spoke Bill liked his joke but still goldarn his  
eyes  
A man had ought to consider his mates in the way he  
goes and dies

Have you ever stood in an Arctic hut in the shadow of  
the Pole  
With a little coffin six by three and a grief you can't  
control  
Have you ever sat by a frozen corpse that looks at you  
with a grin  
And that seems to say you may try all day but you'll  
never jam me in

I'm not a man of the quitting kind but I never felt so  
blue  
As I sat there gazing at that stiff and studying what I'd  
do  
Then I rose and I kicked off the husky dogs that were  
nosing round about  
And I lit a roaring fire in the stove and I started to thaw  
Bill out

Well I thawed and I thawed for thirteen days but it  
didn't seem no good  
His arms and his legs stuck out like pegs as if they  
were made of wood  
Till at last I said it ain't no use he's froze too hard to  
thaw  
He's obstinate and he won't lie straight so I guess I got  
to saw

So I sawed off poor Bill's arms and legs and I laid him  
snug and straight  
In the little coffin he picked hisself with the dinky silver

plate  
And I came nigh near to shedding a tear as I nailed him  
safely down  
Then I stowed him away in my Yukon sleigh and I  
started back to town

So I buried him as the contract was in a narrow grave  
and deep  
And there he's waiting the Great Clean-up when the the  
Judgment sluice-heads sweep  
And I smoke my pipe and I meditate in the light of the  
Midnight Sun  
And sometimes I wonder if they was the awful things I  
done

And as I sit and the parson talks expounding of the Law  
I often think of poor old Bill and how hard he was to  
saw

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