

Hank Snow

"Ballad Of One Eyed Mike"

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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 it's head
Like butterflies of a monster size
Then I knew it for the Dead.

It's 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 I'll 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 it's cheek-bones gleamed
And it's fingers flicked the shore
And it lapped and lay in a weary way
And it's 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.

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