

Hank Snow

"The Cremation Of Sam McGee"

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There are strange things done in the midnight sun
By the men who toil 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.

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.

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.

And that very night as we lay packed tight
In our robes beneath the snow
And the dogs were fed and the stars o'er head
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.

Well, he seemed so low that I couldn't say no
Then he says with a sort of moan

It's the cursed cold and it's got right hold
Till I'm chilled clean through to the bone.

Yet taint 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.

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.

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.

Now a promise made is a debt unpaid
And the trail has it's 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
Oh 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 crematorium.

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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