

# Gambler Dan

by George Albert Leddy

**THROUGH TWENTY YEARS OF LIVING HELL,  
OF MINGLED LOVE AND HATE;  
CURSING THE STRANGER, BLESSING HIS NELL.  
OH GOD! WHAT A TERRIBLE FATE.**

The Sea Dog Inn was gay that night, the lights were all aglow;  
From o'er the bar the whiskey glass, was quick to come and go.

The organ in the corner, filled the air with ragtime tune;  
While Sailor boys with Lassies fair, glide lightly 'round the room.

They do not heed the storm without, for all is warmth within;  
The Lassies' hearts are light and gay, the boys are home again.

The old box-stove, that had for years, bid welcome from the cold;

Far dearer to the Sailors' hearts, than were the shining gold;

Now crackled as the fire burned the pitch from out the pine;

And shed a glow across a face, so wrinkled yet so kind.

It was the face of Rising Moon, the last one of a band;

Of Redskins whom the Whites had driven, from this very land.

A Sailor called the Redskin's name: "Come, Rising Moon!" called he;  
"We'll drink your health as one who's lived, as white as Whites can be."

The old man did not heed the words, but gazed with steadfast eye;

Into that mass of burning coals, where embers glow and die.

Again they call, he heeds, he comes, holds high the sparkling glass;

Cries: "Drink, for e'er another sun some man will drink his last!"

"What mean ye?" cried the jolly tars, as laughter filled the room;

"Be this a warning or a threat? Pray, tell us, Rising Moon!"

"Jest not," he cried in trembling voice, "but pray for death is near;

The Vultures soar above the camp, the very air feels queer!

The story that I read tonight, among the living coals;

Will come as sure as ocean waves, before the high wind rolls."

A sneering laugh resounded, from a corner over where;

Slick Gambler Dan was lolling, in his big and easy chair:

"Come play the game—tonight, I'll stake a hundred in the pool;

Don't waste your time a-list'ning, to that poor old Indian fool."

"Play not the cards," the Redskin cried, "but pray ye, everyone;

For God will judge some crime-stained soul, before another sun!"

A gust of wind has swept the cards, they scatter on the floor;  
And there among them lies a form, that tumbled in the door.  
Of man or beast, it's hard to tell, they raise the shaggy head;  
Within the bloodshot eyes they see, a soul by vengeance led.  
In snarling curring voice he cried—his form convulsed with pain:  
“Give me a drink of your cursid rum, to cool my burning brain!”

The brandy flask is quick to come, he drains it to the last;  
Then wildly springs upon his feet, his breath is coming fast:  
“Look, look!” he cried to Gambler Dan, “Look, look,” he cried, “‘tis I;  
The man who saved your worthless life, who'd ought to let you die;  
The man who sprang into that wild, and roaring watery hell;  
And dragged from there a Serpent, to bring home to Little Nell.

“Yes, Little Nell's my daughter, men, and motherless from birth;  
To me, she was the fairest creature, ever on this earth.  
Her Mother's hair, her Mother's eyes, her Mother's happy smile;  
Her Mother's very heart and soul, were with her all the while.  
I loved her for herself, alone, and for her Mother, too;  
The love I felt for Little Nell, was ever staunch and true.

“Well, on that day the mountain stream, swelled by the springtime rains;  
Rushed madly down the rocky hill, to reach the spreading plain.  
I stood upon the mossy bank, above that awful roar;  
I heard a cry: ‘For God sake help!’—I thought of nothing more;  
Till later on the river's bank, I waked as in a prayer;  
A Stranger lying at my feet, my fingers clutched his hair.

“I tried to speak, my mind seemed dead, my heart seemed filled with fear;  
The cry for help: ‘For God sake help!’ kept ringing in my ear.  
And when I got the Stranger home, and told the tale to Nell;  
She said, ‘Twas God that sent you, Dad, and brought you back as well.  
He helped you fight, to win, to save—Oh praise His name!’ she said.  
That's just the way her Mother'd talk, had she been there instead.

“Well, Nell, she brought the Stranger in; she worked and brought him to;  
She held his hand, she smoothed his brow, just as a mother'd do.  
And later when he told us that, he must be on his way;  
She threw her arms around his neck, and begged of him to stay.  
I could not see why Little Nell, would grieve so much for him;  
My God! I never thought the child—could know a secret sin.

“He went, and as the summer passed, my Nell had sadder grown;  
My God! the truth, the bitter truth, at last to me was known.  
And as the leaves of autumn fell, they covered o’er a mound;  
Where sleeps my Darling and her Babe—in death, sweet rest, she found.  
And o’er her grave, I prayed to God, to send my soul to Hell;  
Should I e’er cease, before I had, avenged my Little Nell.

“He tried me hard, to see if I were firm unto my prayer;  
For twenty years, he sent me on and on, I knew not where.  
Today I fell, I thought ‘twas o’er, but my spirit seemed to feel;  
A drawing to this lonely spot, as the magnet draws the steel.  
I rose and staggered on again, my whole form filled with pain;  
But I win— thank God— for he and I are face-to-face again!

“The vows I made above her grave, tonight, I’m going to fill;  
The Cur who wrecked her sweet young life, tonight, I’m going to kill;  
The Cur who brought me twenty years, of sorrow and disgrace;  
Who thought me dead, now wakes to find that we are face-to-face.  
Prepare, you Cur—pray God above, to save your soul from Hell;  
Tonight, your life will right the wrong—you did my Little Nell!”

A crash of glass, a window smashed; slick Gambler Dan is gone;  
A beastly cry, a tiger spring; the race for life is on.  
The old man pauses where a cliff o’er hangs the rocky shore;  
Again that cry: “For God sake help!”—he knows that all is o’er.  
With bowed down head, he wanders back, his step is weak and slow;  
“He helped me win—oh praise His name!” Nell said so long ago.”

He pushed the brandy flask aside, he said, “No, never more.”  
He staggered, and we laid him there, upon the barroom floor.  
His time-worn face, bright with a smile, his eyes are open wide;  
With outstretched arms, he cried, “My Nell, I’ve found you!”—then he died.

The wild waves lash the rocky shore, like beasts on fury bent;  
With lightning flash and thunder roar, the blackened skies were wrent.  
Within, they do not heed the storm, strong men with bowed-down heads;  
They murmur prayers they’d long forgot, in honor of the dead.  
The Redskin raised the sparkling glass, cried, “Drink, for all is well;  
A noble soul’s in Heaven, men—and a crime-stained soul’s in Hell!”

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