

# The Sapphire Ring

by George Albert Leddy

**YOU MAY NOT LIKE THIS LITTLE TALE,  
THE MINER TOLD ABOUT THE TRAIL.  
WELL IF YOU DON'T, JUST PASS IT BY;  
WE'LL STILL BE FRIENDS, YOU AND I.**

*He leaned on the bar, and lit a cigar, and he ordered a bottle of rum;  
His eyes they were bleared, as he peered through his beard,  
and his features were all out-of-plumb;  
But he threw out his chest, and he pulled down his vest, and he cried:*

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Belly-up to the bar!

I am paying tonight, while the spirit is light, so drink hearty whoever you are!

I'm just in from the trails, and I'm totin' a tale, I want you all to know;  
'Twill fill you with fright, and freeze you so tight, the blood in your veins won't flow.  
So fill up your carafes, with rum that is hot, and heed well every word that I say;  
I don't give a shot, if you believe it or not, but it proves that a sinner must pay.

Oh I've been around, and I've hit every town, from Mexico City to Nome;  
I never was much for the women or such, and mostly I've traveled alone.  
I've journeyed the land of the hot shifting sands, I've roamed o'er the plain's broad expanse.  
Wherever they might report a new strike, I was there with the first for my chance.

Oh, I have had pals, and perhaps a few gals, I'm not what you'd call a "Black Ace."  
'Twas a dance and a song, then travel along, but never stay long in one place.  
'Tis the call of the North, that invisible force, that seeps through the blood in your veins;  
'Tis a land that you'll curse, you'll hate it at first, but ever you'll go back again.

Why, I could tell you the names of dance-hall dames, who won fame in those ribald days;  
They were life to the man, with the pick and the pan: the Miner who always pays.  
They painted their lips, and they padded their hips, they smoothed-out their wrinkles with clay;  
They'd dance and they'd sing, they'd stick and they'd cling, to the man who had Gold for the pay.

For 'twas Gold they sought, and 'twas Gold they got, or they knew the reason why.  
A pretty Miss, with a little kiss, would hardly have to try;  
For a lonely man, in a lonely land, is a careless man and free;  
And a pretty face, in a lonely place, is just what it ought to be.

Why, I knew the dame that they called "The Flame," 'cause she set men's hearts on fire;  
I danced with her one Christmas Eve, then bought her a large Sapphire.  
A large Sapphire, in a little ring, that shown on her finger slim;  
Like the skies of night, when the Northern Lights danced forth, from the Polar-rim.

I bought it off from a gamblin' man, and it took all the Gold I had;  
But what did I care, 'twas Christmas Eve, and the gift had made her glad.  
And I thought me the thoughts, I had long forgot, and I dreamed of a future divine;  
And we danced, and we sang, till the rafters rang, to the tune of Auld Lang Syne.

Then she wanted to say, in her quiet way, and her dainty little smile:  
"I'm tired Dear, if you'll wait here, I'll rest a little while.  
Don't go away, for Christmas Day, I'll meet you with the dawn;  
And like a Sprite on an errant night, my Will-o'-the-wisp was gone.

And I waited there, like the fool I were, and the hours passed away;  
And the night skies paled, and the grey skies hailed, the birth of another day.  
The birth of another sucker born, who had thrown his Gold away.  
And that was a Merry Christmas morn,' but to me, it was just a joke;  
For, what can a Merry Christmas mean—to a man when he knows he's broke?

Did you ever sit in an Arctic camp, when the Gang had gathered in;  
where Millionaire and Gutter-rat, unite?  
Did you ever sit and listen to the old piano ring—did you ever feel your tired feet grow light?  
Did you ever play at Faro; did you ever feel the thrill to come in rich, then lose all on one throw?  
Did you ever feel the burning kiss of painted-lips-of-sin?  
You didn't—then there's things you'll never know.

Well, that was me, now down and out, a fool to a woman's wiles;  
A fool to a woman's painted lips, her padded hips, and her smile;  
To a game so old that it's oft' been told, by your Great-grandfather's sire;  
Of a little ring, just a dainty thing, with a very large Sapphire.

Well, I didn't sigh, and I didn't cry, and I didn't curse or swear;  
I took the loss, and I paid the cost, as I would, had the game been square.  
But I marked them both, and I took an oath, "that we'd meet again someday;  
And we'd play a game of a different name, and play in a different way."

So I grubbed-a-stake from a mangy snake, oily and slick was he;  
'Twas five to him, of the Gold I'd take, to the one that was kept by me.  
Well, I was down, but I wasn't out, and the dogs were slick and strong;  
So with loaded-sleigh, well on my way, my heart was filled with song.

For I loved the life, and I loved the trail, and I loved the biting cold;  
I loved the silence, vast and deep, and the snows a century old.  
I loved the lights in the skies of night, yet I cursed their blinding glare;  
As they marched to the left, and they marched to the right, an army of the air.

I loved the whine of the sturdy pine, as she battles a killing gale;  
'Tis proof again that the strong will win, where the weakling's sure to fail.  
I love the whine of the snarling dogs, as they cringe from the bitter cold;  
And the crack of the whip, with the frozen tip, was music to my soul.

Yes, I loved it all with a burning hate, and I cursed it with every breath;  
Like the Dog will love his Master, 'though, he's beating him half-to-death.  
Well, I will not dwell on that year-of-hell, 'tis enough that I should say:  
That again I'd won, and my work was done, and I loaded up the sleigh.

Well, the dogs were fast, and the miles flew past, and the bleak hills fell behind;  
And I laughed and sang, till the silence rang, and the dogs in the traces whined.  
Then we came to the Shack on the side of the track, I'd stayed there oft' before;  
It stood like a wart on the side of the hill, with never a lock on the door.

Well, the Dogs knew the place, and they quickened the pace, and came to the door on the run;  
They soon would be fed, I'd be making my bed, the work of the first day done.

Well, I saw a sight in the Shack that night, that would make a Parson swear:  
On the floor lay the dame, that they called "The Flame," and her back and her breasts, all bare.  
And the eyes once bright, now a gruesome sight, and the painted lips now blue;  
And the hair now white, with a glistening light, where the frost had sifted through.

And I touched a hand, that was marble cold; and I touched a breast, and I thought:  
Of the Tale that I'd heard a Parson preach, of sin, and the pain it wrought.  
I remembered well, what he said 'bout Hell, with its fires all aglow;  
And I thought that night, perhaps he's right, but I wondered—how he'd know?

But she did not atone for her sins alone, another followed soon.  
I heard a sound, and I looked around, and just across the room;  
There on a stool, sat a raving Fool, the man who had staked-the-game;  
The man who had sold that Sucker-ring—to each man who had loved The Flame.

The scurvy germ, just a filthy worm, sucking his life away;  
Like the windlass sucking the yellow spew, from a hole in the frozen clay.  
“There wasn’t a tooth in the sagging jaw, there wasn’t a hair on the head;  
The face, like a piece of beef-steak raw, the nerve in the body dead;  
Deaf as an adder, blind as a bat, but never he felt the pain;  
‘Twas the story old, so often told—”the North has struck again.”

Can you imagine how I felt, as I sat in the Shack that night;  
With a pack of greedy, snarling Dogs, and a corpse all frozen tight;  
And the fire low, shed a ghostly glow, of shadows on the wall;  
And a man gone mad, and a moanin’ bad, and ice spreading over all.

Then the wind’s low moan, and the Huskies groan, as they dream as a Husky dreams;  
And the crackle and snap, of the pine-knot sap, as it seeps from the wood and steams.  
Then Death crept in to the Shack again, with a grim and silent tread;  
And the crazy Fool fell off the stool, and lay by his Sweetheart—dead.

And then I knelt, and I think I prayed, at least I know I tried;  
And I cried, when I thought of the way they’d lived, but I laughed at the way they died.  
Then the short-lived sun, on the distant rim, turned the sky to a bright blood-red;  
And shown on the ice, on the windowpane, like candles for the dead.

Then I thought of the Tale that the Parson told, the tale that I now believe;  
And I thought of a Lassie, sweet and fair, of a long-gone Christmas Eve.  
Then the heavens scowled, and a Wolf-pack howled, as I loaded up the sleigh;  
And the long whip nips, the lead-dog’s hip, and again we’re on our way.

Now, I think of the Wolves on the opposite hill, and I think of the pair on the floor;  
And I wonder tonight, “Did I do right?”— I didn’t close the door!

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*Now that is the story, as I heard it told, by the man who leaned on the bar;  
The man who ordered a bottle of rum, and lit a big cigar;  
Who swung the whip with the frozen tip, who prayed, or at least he tried;  
Who cried when he thought of the way they lived, and laughed at the way they died.*

*But they drank his drinks, ‘cause his drinks were free, and the hot rum warmed their throats;  
Thought: “Just another poor-lost-soul, who had missed too many boats.”  
Then they moved away, and the crowd grew gay, and the old piano rang;  
And the dancers danced, and the prancers pranced—aye, and the singers sang.*

*Then he turned around, and there came a sound, from his throat, and I wondered why;  
Then I saw he knew, that they thought he lied, and a tear fell from his eye.  
Well I felt bad, for the worn-out lad, who was old, 'though, his years were few;  
But I held my peace, for the time at least, there's nothing I could do.*

*Then he sought a chair, and he slumped down there, and soon was fast asleep;  
And he dreamed the dreams, that a Miner dreams, of mountains dark and deep.*

*Now I may be wrong, or I may be right; the which, I dare not say;  
But I got sight of a rose-pink light, where his coat had fell away;  
And pinned to his shirt, that was glazed with dirt, o'er his heart, or a little higher;  
Was a little ring, just a dainty thing—with a very large Sapphire!*

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